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ABSTRACT

While specific subjects vary, the theme of this collection of seven articles is the nonformal education of adult migrants in India. The first article documents several aspects of adult education activities undertaken by Mobile Creches for Working Mothers' Children, an organization providing integrated day care for the children (from birth through age 12) of low-income women working on construction sites and in resettlement colonies. Much of this article and others in the collection focuses specifically on the problems, likelihood, and successes of literacy education programs. The second article describes difficulties in conducting research to evaluate programs for migrants. The third article questions the belief that adults should first be taught to read in their mother tongue, while the fourth article describes adult education for social change that involves awareness groups organized to obtain redress of injustices. A nonformal adult literacy project serving, among others, Moslem women and girls generally restricted to their homes (in "purdah") is described in the fifth article. The sixth article discusses the efforts and successes of forest people who organized a social movement to protect the environment of the Himalayas from further exploitation. In conclusion, activities of the "People's Messenger" theater group, the communication arm of Mobile Creches, are described in the seventh article. The 1981-1982 annual report of Mobile Creches in Bombay completes the document. (RH)

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MOBILE CRECHES

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ANNUAL REPORT (Bombay) 1981-82

Mobile Creches continues to be a service to protect the children of migrant construction workers from the perils of migrancy and preparing them for a better future.

After ten years of experiment and constant learning, we can today say with some confidence that Mobile Creches is a place where quality service on a low budget is offered and the child realising his potential is the goal.

The main contents of this report are :

I. Our work with children.
II. Work with the community.
III. Personnel.
IV. Contacts.
V. PUNE — a branch. .
VI. Finances.

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I OUR WORK WITH CHILDREN

We focus our attention on the age group 0-12 years by providing them, in their environment, a home while their mothers are at work. Large construction sites are located, the contractor is approached and if he is willing, a creche is set up in a part of the building under construction, or in a separate structure on the premises.

Medicare, supplementary nutrition and non-formal-play based system of education is their daily routine between 8.30 a.m. and 4.30 p.m.

In this year, we have catered to an average of 2025 children per month on 19 construction sites and 7 slum centres.

COVERAGE

Cumulative no. of centres (1981-82)	31
Construction sites	24
Slum centres	7
Average no. of centres at any given time	24
Construction sites	17
Slum centres	7
Centres opened (1980-81)	9
Centres opened (1981-82)	7
Total no. of centres opened since inception	74

AVERAGE ATTENDANCE OF CHILDREN DURING THE YEAR :

	0-3 yrs.	3-6 yrs.	6+	Total
Construction sites	323	494	553	1370
Slum centres	116	419	119	655
Total	439	913	672	2025

The average attendance of the children during the year in the cumlative number of centres in 1981-82 (31 centres) gives a silent indication that a larger no. of children have availed of our services in a lesser cumlative no. of centres than the year before(33). This also points to the fact that the "Mobile" features of the community we work with is as valid to-day as in the past. Our records show that out of 8044 children who were able to attend our creches, more than 5500 stayed at any particular centre for only 3 months. Only about 1300 children continued to be with us for 7 to 12 months. A very small number make it upto 2 years at one place. The ingrained feature of the construction industry — the use of different kinds of skills and labour at different stages of construction — is the major reason for their mobility.

MEDICAL CARE AND HEALTH

The health of the community depends a great deal on the level of social awareness.

Hygiene is the base on which we start our work with the children at our centres. The parents work the full day. Mothers carry the added burden of domestic chores when they come back. The older children seem to share the responsibility of childcare and other jobs at home with their mothers. In our programme cleanliness is emphasised and its advantages shown to their children. The older children are taught simple ways of coping with the minor health problems of their siblings. Awareness about the need for a clean environment is created through practical work on the fundamentals of hygiene through their activities during the day.

After the initial combat with the results of deprivation in a child when he arrives at our centre, the action is mainly preventive. We get the children immunized against childhood diseases, through the Municipal Health Services. Vitamin A, other vitamins and iron is given to the children on doctors prescriptions. We have a panel of 8 doctors who make weekly rounds to centres allocated to them. The staff is trained to execute prescriptions and to go to the nearest public hospital in case of emergencies.

All children get milk, a hot mid-day meal, ragi-porridge (Ragi is a local grain rich in Protein and iron) to supplement their diet at home. Ragi-porridge has helped them to an improved health status, as has been observed in our research with the communities.

During this year there were epidemics mumps, measles, and chicken pox. Supportive Ayurvedic treatment has helped to minimise complications.

A number of Home remedies have been identified.

One centre at Malad continue working in co-operation with K.E.M. Hospital on malnourished children who are given special protein and high calorie diets to bring their health upto the mark.

Ref: Annexure I.

LEARNING : Formal and Non-formal : Children admitted in Municipal Schools:

Total No. of children admitted in 1980 — 312.

Total No. of children admitted in 1981 — 274.

A high degree of mobility among the construction workers reduces the chances of the children going to Municipal Schools. The children in slums and resettlement colonies get trained for admissions into Municipal Schools at the right age and do well for themselves. Many children continue taking help from our teachers even after they go to the formal schools.

The children at the construction sites go throug a similar learning process as their counter parts in slums. They get admitted into school after tests. Quite a

few children manage to get double promotions and start their schooling in Std. II. Lots of children top their classes and do well in extracurricular activities. They leave the site and the school when their parents move. We try to get them re-admitted near their new site or coax the parents to do so. A few examples of the schools rejecting them after a break in studies is a part of our experience. The Municipal Education Office does intervene and help in such cases.

Many children who have not had the exposure to the disciplined way of learning at schools prefer the informal atmosphere at our centres. They learn their 3 R's and develop their talents at the centers

Non-formal education covers all the children who come to us. Learning is made interesting through stories, role-play, art and craft and exciting with pictures puppets and games.

A new project called "Insight" based on visuals is being developed through action research approach. The themes are chosen from the children's environment and will help develop their awareness all round and formulate ideas towards their being useful citizens of the society they live in.

To make their language learning process easy and enjoyable, a carefully planned project for language development is on the way.

The children work on projects like food for energy, money and savings, planets, parts of the body etc. The emphasis is on environmental studies.

Extra curricular activities include games, elocution and recitation. Excursions and outings are arranged to acquaint the children with their surroundings. Children at most centres visited the nearest market, post office, and dairy. Some managed to go on to the Zoo, museum and children's parks.

DEVELOPMENTAL ACTIVITIES

The annual Inter centre talent competition sponsored by the Rotary Club of New Bombay saw the active participation of children from all the centres. The adjudicators commended the standard of the items presented as 'high'.

SPORTS

The centres celebrated 5th December as the Founder's Day with sports competitions for all the groups but the infants.

All the children who participated in the Inter centre Talent competition stayed over night at Vashi, New Bombay. This became one of the most enjoyable camps of the year for the children and the staff. Tremendous enthusiasm and a high degree of willingness was exhibited by all the children at the sports events.

ARTS AND CRAFTS

Arts and Crafts form an integral part of the non-formal education curriculum. We believe that opportunities for creative expression and acsasthetic satisfaction is a developmental need for all children. At Mobile Creches time is set aside for creative activities with materials from the child's environment or those acquired at minimal cost. Children are helped to develop their eye-hand co-ordination and are encourage to express themselves with freedom and confidence through the use of various media and activities. e.g. paints, crayons, clay; collage work; pattern making, paper sculpture, simple printing etc. These activities are also co-related with project work in social studies and general knowledge.

II Work With The Community

The parents of the children attending our centres are in constant touch with the creche workers, teachers and field supervisors. The parents are talked to when-

ever an opportunity arises, when they come to leave or pick up their children or when they come in to feed their babies. The need for cleanliness, home remedies, food for nutrition, Immunisation, weaning and supplementary foods, care of pregnant and lactating mother, education of children is discussed with them.

Parents meetings are held every month to discuss subjects given above or when the community come in to celebrate occasions like Ganpati day New Year, the opportunity to talk to them is taken.

Community pariticipation is rather difficult because of the long hours that the parents put in at work but their involvement is evident and recognised through joint ventures with our staff and during emergencies that occur at the centres.

A sewing class started last year at the request of the Mathadi workers has been doing well training ladies of that colony. A total of 30 ladies are under training

More teachers and field supervisors have been trained by FPAI to propagate family planning as a part of their work in the community.

Our staff consciously propagate home-remedies. The goal is to make the parents "aware" of the materials in their surroundings or that are easily available which can be used to treat minor health upsets.

III Personnel

A total of 170 staff members carry out the work. This includes 140 creche mothers or teachers, 20 field supervisors and the personnel based at the office.

GROWTH OF PERSONNEL

Keeping the needs of our programme in mind, the staff members are trained by us while they work with us.

The workers after their training become confident crechemothers. The seniors help the juniors adjust into the job and guide them at work.

The day-care workers are trained to teach the children coming from different language and cultural backgrounds and developmental stages, as their learning process is obstacled by the "on the move" character of their parents. The training is divided into teaching Balwadi, pre-primary and primary school children. They are trained to administer doctors' prescriptions, cope up with emergencies, keep the records at the centres and guide the new recruits. Training includes identification of simple illnesses, home remedies and knowledge of nutrition.

Staff trained are ready to take on responsibility to become centre incharges. They become responsible for the smooth running of their centres and maintain accounts. Keeping the objectives and the ideals of the organisation in mind the supervisors help and guide the staff at each centre towards them. They keep and propagate a code of conduct and share the burden of the resource people who develop and implement the training programme. A few supervisors talented in arts and crafts get special training to carry out the arts and crafts programme.

We plan to extend the training of teachers and use their creative abilities in producing simple toys and puppets for creche children and simple learning aids for all levels.

The teachers in turn will help older children at the centres to develop the same skills which are vocational in nature and can therefore be of tangible use to these children in the future.

A silk screen printing unit has been set up. The teachers also attend workshops organised by other agencies to further their skills, apart from the training sessions taken up by specialists and resource people.

NO. OF TRAINING SESSIONS IN THE YEAR

Supervisors	—	23
Incharges	—	23
Day-care workers	—	16
Creche workers	—	11
Balwadi Training for literate creche workers	—	11
Health training II	—	9
Health training I	—	9
New recruits	—	1
Art supervisors	—	5
Refresher course	—	1
General knowledge workshops	—	6

The office based staff seem to have their grinds to go through and develop an insight into their work and takea on a lot responsibility as and when expected to. All work in the spirit of "harambee" — „pulling together" through thick and thin.

SEMINARS AND WORKSHOPS

Mobile creches, Bombay hosted a two-day Inter-Branch-Inter-Action seminar in Jan '1982. It was a session for self-evaluation and planning for the future for representative members from Delhi, Pune and Bombay and the office bearers.

Other seminars, workshops and training sessions attended by us are as follows:

August '81 M.C. was invited by the National Institute of design to a seminar on Toys.

August '81 members of our group attended a seminar cum workshop hosted by the Child to Child programme in India.

September '81. A talk on Day care services was given to the field workers of CASP under training at T.I.S.S.

September '81. M.C. gave a lecture cum illustration of our work at a IAPE meeting. We presented a slide show of all our activities at the centres.

October '81. A representative was sponsored by RCF to attend a week long course on Increasing organisational effectiveness in service organisations.

March '82. Aids used for teaching mathematical concepts were exhibited at an IAPE meeting called to discuss mathematics in the Pre-school.

IV Contacts

We are touch with the engineers and contractors. Most of them once convinced seem to understand and support the cause of the welfare of children. Many of them contribute willingly towards the cost of running the programme. We definitely look forward to a day when all the contractors are convinced of the advantages of having the children of the labourers well looked after and Mobile Creches will become a part of their 'plan' on the sites.

Special mention must be made of Cidco authorities who have given us increased amounts of money towards running of our creches in CIDCO and HUDCO

"Adopted": We were adopted by the students of J.B. Petit school for their SUPW (socially useful and productive work.) They made a lot of scrapbooks, toys, clothes and learning aids for the children.

"Filmed": Activities of Mobile creches caught the attention of a group from England producing documentaries. The main objective was to project that preventive medicine can go to groups of peple rather than the people goirg to hospitals for treatment.

VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers come and go devoting whatever time they can, doing whatever they can for the organisation. They bring in brightness and cheer to all.

Students of Scholar High School have been making learning aids for the children of our creches for the past six months. students of Fort convent too have helped.

V Extention To Pune

Pune branch is two years old. We have 4 centres on record since the inception of the branch. Two centres are in operation at present. The average attendance at these centres is 30 to 35 children in one centre and 90 children in the other centre.

LEARNING

Children admitted in Municipal Schools

No. of children admitted in 1980 3.

No. of children admitted is 1981 — 19.

The education programme is carried out on the lines of the Mobile creches tradition. The children are trained to be admitted into the nearest primary schools and need arising, a certificate of competency is issued for the children going away to their villages.

Extra curricular activities last year included sports, folk dancing, sight seeing picnic etc.

HEALTH

A total of 513 cases were treated for different diseases of child-hood.

Most of the children attending the centres have been immunised. Doses of Vitamin A were given to the children — on doctors prescription.

Under nourished children were given a high protein and carbohydrate diet.

COMMUNITY WORK

The staff of Mobile Creches are constantly in touch with the parents of the children who avail of our services. The initial inhibition of the parents has gone, and enthusiastically join the celebrations of the festivals like Diwali, Dassera, New Year etc. The doctor conducted Mother's meetings on subjects like hygiene, immunisation etc.

STAFF

Staff are recruited and trained on the job. With regular interaction between the staff of Bombay and Pune, trained supervision has been possible.

VI Finances

DONORS

We are thankful to our major donors who help the programme in a big way. Catholic Relief Services continues to provide the basic food items necessary for the mid-day meal, and Brothers to All Men donate large amounts of milk powder. OXFAM reimburses our expenses on the vehicles and, also takes care of part running costs as well as fund-raising expenses. IGSS contributes towards staff salaries, travel reimbursements and office expenses.

We give below in percentage the income and expenditure under different heads.

Expenditure

Services — Creche/Schools	73.6%
Training Programme	6.5%
Research & Evaluation	0.1%
Operational Cost	10.9%
Administration	7.4%
Capital Assets	1.5%
	100.0

Income

Grants/Donations for Sp. purposes	65.5%
Contractors contribution	7.9%
Donations : Corpus & General	10.8%
Fees	1.0%
Sponsorship	0.2%
Miscellaneous Income	2.0%
Fund Raising	12.6%
	100.0

FUND RAISING :

We raise funds mainly by selling Greeting cards during the festive seasons and throughout the year as well as arranging either a cultural show or a film premiere along with the publication of a brochure supported by companies and well wishers, This year a premiere show of the James Bond movie Moonraker" was a great success.

DONATIONS IN CASH TOWARDS CORPUS FUND-ORGANISATIONS & COMPANIES :

Ajay Gem Company
Alembic Glass Industries
Amanci Pvt. Ltd.
Ardeshri B. Cursetjee & Sons Pvt. Ltd.
Associated Cement Cos. Ltd.
Award Packaging
Bajaria Brothers
Balmer Lawrie and Co. Ltd.
Bomanji Dhunjibhoy Pvt. Ltd.
Bank of India
Baroda Rayon Corp. Ltd.
Bayer (India) Ltd.
Bharat Petroleum Corp. Ltd.
Blue Star
C. M. Gandhi and Co.
CIDCO Ltd.
Calico Mills
Century Rayon
Cheap Motor Stores
Colgate Palmolive (India) Ltd.
Conwood Construction Co. Pvt. Ltd.
Crompton Greaves
DCM Data Products
Dalal Engineering Pvt. Ltd.
Dolphin Fisheries Pvt. Ltd.
Engineering Construction Corpn. Pvt. Ltd.
Food Specialities Ltd.
Glaxo Laboratories Ltd.
Grindlays Bank Ltd.
Godrej and Boyce Co. Ltd.
Golani and Co.
H.F. Sobhasingh and Sons
Harshid Exports
Herdillia Chemical Ltd.
Hico Products Ltd.
Hindustan Construction Co. Ltd.
Hindustan Lever Ltd.
Hindustan Steel and Metal Works
Hoechst Pharmaceutical Ltd.
Hotel Searock
India Tube Mills and Metal Industries Pvt. Ltd.
Indo Burma Petroleum Co. Ltd.
Indo Nippon Chemical Co. Ltd.
John Wyeth Laboratories
K. Mohan and Co.
K. Vijaykumar
Kent Pharmaceuticals (India) Pvt. Ltd.
Kores (India) Ltd.
Lakme Ltd.
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M/s. Devidas and Co.
M/s. Indoco Remedies
M/s. Sangam Metal Dealers
M/s. Commonwealth Textiles
M/s. R. Sharp and Sons Pvt. Ltd.
M/s. Senior Construction Co. Pvt. Ltd.
Mahindra and Mahindra Ltd.
Mazagaon Docks Ltd.
Metro Exporter Pvt. Ltd.
Mindia Chemicals Ltd.
New Vinod Silk Mills
Oxford University Press
PMP Auto Industries Pvt. Ltd.
Paragon Textiles
Parke-Davis
Pest Control (India) Pvt. Ltd.
Philips (India) Ltd.
Premiere Automobiles Ltd.
Polyolefins Industries Ltd.
R. Kantilal and Co.
Rallis India Ltd.
Rashtriya Chemicals & Fertilisers Pvt. Ltd.
Ruby Coach Builders Pvt. Ltd.
S.S. Miranda Pvt. Ltd.
Shapoorji Pallonji and Co. Pvt. Ltd.
Shree Venkatesh Properties Pvt. Ltd.
Shri Shiv Shakti Transport Co.
Siemens (India) Ltd.
Standard Batteries Ltd.
State Bank of India
Swissair
Tata Chemicals
Tata Engineering & Locomotive Pvt. Ltd.
Tata Exports Ltd.

Tata Iron and Steel Co.
Tata Oil Mills Co. Ltd.
Tata Textiles
Telepole Manufacturing Co. Pvt. Ltd.
United Commercial Bank
United Carbon India Ltd.
Union Construction Co. Pvt. Ltd.
Universal Commercial Co.
Vijay Flexible Containers Pvt. Ltd.
Well Wishers
Well Wishers
WIMCO

DONATIONS IN CASH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES INDIVIDUALS:

Ms. Anuja Shah
Mr. Bayanath Yadav
Ms. Damayanti Thakkar
Mrs. Gopinath
Dr. Gomati Venkatraman
Dr. Jagtiani
Mr. Jayesh Samant
Ms. Neelaxi Mankar
Mrs. Rukmini Mahadevan
Dr. Sarah Jacob
Mrs. Samant
Ms. Savita Raja
Mrs. Sheela Jacob
Ms. Sheetal Danave
Ms. Shubhada Danave
Ms. Sugandha Laad
Ms. Suchita Ullal
Ms. Veena Atre
Ms. Vrinda Angane

DONATIONS IN CASH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES-ORGANISATIONS:

Dodsal Pvt. Ltd.
German Community, Bombay
J.B. Petit High School
MWC Centre, Kandivali

DONATIONS IN CASH TOWARDS CORPUS FUND-INDIVIDUALS:

Ms. Fatima Merchant
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Ms. Ingrid Fuerbringer
Ms. Ivy Moses
Mr. Janson
Mrs. K. A. Dubash
Ms. Kavina and Keshav
Mr. Mansukhani
Ms. Kavita Marathe
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Mr. Mark Dixon
Ms. Philipi Lonten
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Ms. Pia Kripalani
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Ms. Saroj Jobanputra
Dr. S. A. Kelkar
Dr. Sarah Jacob
Ms. Santosh Puri
Mr. Satish Mody
Ms. Suchita Ullal
Rotary Club of New Bombay
Ms. Ved Lekhi
Reverend Vochringer
Ms. Vrinda Angane

DONATIONS IN CASH TOWARDS CORPUS FUND-ORGANISATIONS:

Associated Bearing Co. Ltd.
German Protestant Church
German Speaking Protestant Church Community of Bombay
JMM Enterprises
Seema Steel Corporation
Bharat Tiles and Marble Pvt. Ltd.

GRANTS

Central Social Welfare Board
Indo German Social Service Society
Oxfam

DONATIONS IN KIND — ORGANISATIONS:

Sri Satya Sai Baba Seva Mandal
Indian Red Cross Society
Rachana Group
Elizabethan Club
Bombay International School

Johnson & Johnson Pvt. Ltd.
Dept of Family & child welfare students TISS
Inner Wheel Club, Bombay
German Consulate
German School
UNICEF
J.B. Petit High School

DONATIONS IN KIND — INDIVIDUALS:

Ms. A. A. Chavan
Ms. Anjana Shah
Mr. Atul Nagarkar
Ms. Barbara Kempstead
Ms. Bharati Bhat
Mrs. Fairlie
Mrs. Hardip Singh
Mrs. K. A. Dubash
Mrs. Kishen Dev
Mrs. Kiran Agarwal
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Ms. Sudha Shrikhande
Dr. Veena Khubchandani
Mr. Vijay Merchant
Mrs. Vishwanathan
Mrs. Walters
Mrs. Waters
Mrs. Zehra Tyabji

CONTRACTOR'S CONTRIBUTIONS — APRIL '81 — MARCH '82

Ajmera Corporation
Dharah Athiti Estate
Billimoria Construction Pvt. Ltd.
CIDCO
Conwood Construction Co. Pvt. Ltd.
Golani and Company
Maker Development Services
Popular Construction Co.
Shapoorji Pallonji and Co. Pvt. Ltd.
Shree Venkatesh Properties
Telepole Manufacturing Co. Pvt. Ltd.
Union Construction Co.

CHILD SPONSORSHIP SCHEME

Mrs. Edith Wallbrecht
Ms. Gabriella Mebus
Mrs. Homai Mehta
Ms. Vera Udwadia

ANNEXURE I

Breakdown of Illness treated during the year :—

Total no. of children treated	— 8878	cases
Respiratory Diseases	— 1364	"
Gastro-intestinal	— 957	"
Fever	— 1581	"
Skin Diseases	— 1163	"
Worm Infections	— 1000	"
Ear & Eye Infection	— 375	"
Tuberculosis	— 11	"
Virus Infections	— 203	"
General Weakness	— 1834	"
Under nourished children on special diet	— 390	"
No. of adults treated	— 564	"
No. of children Immunized	— 1288	"

CENTRES SINCE INCEPTION

Name of Centre	Date of opening	Date of closing
1. Petit Hall, Nepeansea Road	June 1972	Aug. 1973
2. Jolly Maker, Cuffe Parade	Sept. 1972	Feb. 1975
3. Jolly Maker, Nariman Point	Nov. 1972	Dec. 1974
4. Duggal Construction, Nariman Point	Nov. 1973	Dec. 1974
5. Khahtji Building, Napeansea Road	March 1974	Jan. 1976
6. Chembur Acharya Nagar	May 1974	Sept. 1975
7. Andheri Varma Nagar	June 1974	Feb. 1975
8. Vashi I, New Bombay	Nov. 1974	Sept. 1978
9. Juhu, S.N.D.T. Campus	Dec. 1974	Aug. 1976
10. Haribhai Estate, Cuffe Parade	March 1975	Feb. 1979
11. S.F. Engineer, Sasoon Dock	April 1975	Oct. 1977
12. Vishweshwarya Trade Centre, Cuffe Parade	May 1975	June 1977
13. Children's Aid Society, Mankhurd	July 1975	Feb. 1976
14. B.P.T. Wadala	Oct. 1975	April 1977
15. Kusumkant & Co. Andheri	Feb. 1976	Jan. 1977
16. Mahakali, Golani & Co.	Feb. 1976	April 1980
17. Divine Construction, Vile Parle	March 1976	Dec. 1976
18. Nehru Centre, Worli	March 1976	June 1978
19. New Council Hall, Nariman Point	April 1976	Jan. 1981
20. B.G. Shirke & Co., Police Quarters	July 1976	Feb. 1978
21. B.G. Shirke & Co., Khumbar Chawl Bldg., Repair Board	July 1976	April 1977
22. Mulund Centre (Slum)	Aug. 1976	
23. Children's Complex, Bandra	Nov. 1976	Dec. 1976
24. Wadala (Slum)	Oct. 1976	
25. Dhake Colony, Maharashtra Housing Board, Andheri	Dec. 1976	Del. 1977
26. Belapur I, CIDCO	Dec. 1976	Sept. 1978
27. Navy Nagar Centre, M.E.S.	Feb. 1977	Aug. 1978
28. Teli Galli — Maharashtra Reconstruction Board	April 1977	July 1977
29. R.C. Church	June 1977	May 1978
30. Gaikwad Nagar Unit I (Slum)	July 1977	
31. Sunder Galli	July 1977	Sept. 1978
32. Reserve Bank Centre	Sept. 1977	Oct. 1979
33. Manish Nagar	Nov. 1977	April 1979
34. Gaikwad Nagar Unit II	Dec. 1977	
35. Sailors Quarters I	Feb. 1978	Oct. 1978
36. C.G.Q. Centre	March 1978	
37. Vashi No. II	May 1978	

Name of Centre	Date of opening		Date of closing	
38. Turbha Centre	May	1978	Nov.	1979
39. M.I.G. Andheri	June	1978	Sept.	1979
40. Sonal Construction, Kurla	July	1978	April	1979
41. Maker Chambers, Nariman Point	Sept.	1978		
42. Sailors Quarters II	Oct.	1978	July	1980
43. Belapur II	Dec.	1978		
44. Ushma Nagar, Malad	Jan.	1979	April	1980
45. Bharat Nagar, Bandra	Jan.	1979	Dec.	1979
46. Naval Officers Flats, Luggat Construction	Jan.	1979		
47. E.S.I.S. Hospital, Thana	March	1979	Nov.	1979
48. L.I.G. Bhada Kandivili	April	1979		
49. Mathadi Housing Colony (Kandivli)	July	1979	Feb.	1981
50. M.I.G. II Bhada Andheri	Sept.	1979		
51. Quarry Site (Powai)	Sept.	1979		
52. Nehru Centre, Worli	Dec.	1979		
53. Anushakti Nagar Water Works Project	Dec.	1979	June	1980
54. A.C.C. Bhada Vikhroli	Dec.	1979	Nov.	1980
55. Police Quarters Ghatkopar	Jan.	1980		
56. Prabhat Centre	April	1980		
57. Powai Water Works	April	1980		
58. Gokuldham	April	1980	April	1981
59. Vashi III	June	1980	March	1981
60. Sailors Quarters III	Aug.	1980		
61. Mathadi Workers Children's Centre	Aug.	1980	Jan.	1981
62. Wagle Estate, ESIS Complex	Nov.	1980		
63. Anushakti Nagar Water Works Project II	Nov.	1980	May	1981
64. Central Government Quarters II	Nov.	1980		
65. Post & Telegraphs	Feb.	1981		
66. Collector's Compound, Mahvani Slum	March	1981		
67. Sailor's Quarters IV	March	1981		
68. Dharti Atithi Estate	April	1981		
69. Yogi Nagar, Borivali	April	1981		
70. Belapur Unit III	May	1981		
71. J.J. Hospital Extension	June	1981		
72. Commerce Centre	June	1981		
73. Tapovan Housing Complex	June	1981	Aug.	1981
74. BARC Water Project	Nov.	1981		

MOBILE CRECHES

What it is Today, Mobile Creches for Working Mothers' Children runs a chain of centres in Delhi, Bombay and Pune, providing integrated day-care for the children (aged 0-12) of working women, in low income group on construction sites and resettlement colonies. Its a programme for the whole family.

For whom Unskilled labour from the rural areas of nearby states work on large constructions in the cities. In such families, both men and women work to make both ends meet, moving from site to site and living in temporary huts on the worksites without even the barest civic amenities. Children of migrant labour grow up in a harsh environment exposed to the severest health hazards and acccidents, besides being neglected by parents who have to work. So the care of babies and other household duties are left to the older children who are deprived of the chance of schooling or acquiring skills. On resettlements, the child has a more settled life, but still in poor environmental conditions, exposed to crime, drift and anti-social forces.

How many and where At any time, there are about 30 centres in operation in Delhi and about 24 in Bombay, each with anything from 50 to 250 children, totalling 3000 children in Delhi and 2000 in Bombay. On construction sites, the contractors provide simple accommodation. In resettlemets, low-cos structures using local materials have been put up.

What happens The programme is built around a core of health, nutrition and education. For convenience, the children are divided into groups: creche (0-3), balwadi (3-6) and 6+ in informal primary education, but older children can comfort and take care of younger ones while they study or play. For the youngest, the creche routines emphasise cleanliness, habit formation, nutrition and affectionate interaction with adults, with one staff member for every 10 children. A doctor visits each centre once a week. On construction sites, mothers come in once or twice a day to breastfeed infants Advice on health, nutrition, family planning and child care is given informally at these times. For 3-6 year olds the day includes a wide variety of structured and unstructured play activities, using simple, low-cost, easily replaceable materials and equipment, educational games, arts and crafts, songs and dances. The 6+ get more formal lessons for the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, but with informal methods. Older children admitted to local municipal schools, usually come back for a few hours every day for tutorial help, and other activities. For the adults, the aim is functional literacy, the curriculum and teaching materials reflect their needs, interests and problems.

When it happens The day begins at 8 a.m. with cleaning and setting up of the centre by all the staff; then visits to the homes to collect children and meet parents, cleaning/bathing of the children followed by milk, games and prayers. From 10 a.m. to midday, there are organised activities for each age-group suited to their needs; at noon, a supplementary mid-day meal of porridge with vegetables for all and special nutritive diets for the malnourished. The afternoons are spent informally — arts and crafts, music, drama, gardening, story-telling and reading followed by games and sports till the centre closes at 4.30 p.m. **In Delhi** after 7 p.m. the staff hold literacy classes for both men and women for two hours, five nights a week.

How the community is involved Parents' meetings to **tellabout the programme or ask for help;** demonstrations and discussions on nutrition, health, child care; regular performances by a mobile educational drama troupe which educates while it entertains; celebration of community festivals; film shows, fairs and picnics; these and the daily face-to-face interaction, bring workers and community together.

How it is organised Workers dealing with all age-groups and several activities have to be more than mere teachers. They need skills to care for babies, cook, wash and clean; play games; teach, give first aid, dispense medicines; talk to parents, and many more. Young women and men are selected for aptitude, interest and willingness to work rather than for formal qualifications and given continuous training on-the-job, mostly in the field, by a core of experienced workers. Resource persons and part-time workers also help in the training, which is built around problem solving, decision-making and practical achivement.

How it is financed Most of the money **comes** from grants and donations from the Government of India, State and local Governments, international voluntary agencies, individuals, institutions and trusts. Contributions from building contractors **towards** the running costs of centres on their sites and nominal fees from parents also help. Besides, funds are are raised through activities such as the sale of greeting cards and spices, film premieres, advertisements in the annual and jumble sales by volunteers.

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Ekalavya

Mobile Creches' Annual

1982

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Ekalavya

Our masthead pays homage to Ekalavya—the rejected one. This dark young nishada boy deprived of his rightful place and discriminated against by Drona, the famous brahmin acharya, becomes a brilliant archer by his own efforts, and a rival to the master's famous pupil Arjuna.

Briefly the story is—Ekalavya is not accepted as a pupil by Drona because he is not a Kshatriya. Ekalavya, highly disappointed, fashions a clay model of the master and by sheer grit teaches himself archery. Comes a day when Arjuna's dog passes by and defiles the clay sculpture, and Ekalavya, angered that his most revered object is defiled, sends down arrows that effectively seal the dog's mouth. Arjuna, seeing this, questions why the master has not kept his promise of making him (Arjuna) the best archer. Drona too is puzzled, but he solves the problem in a grossly unjust way.

Ekalavya's dehumanization is complete when the master, taking advantage of Ekalavya's guru bhakti, asks for his right thumb as his guru dakshina. This mythology from the Mahabharatha more than anything else dramatises vivdly the dehumanization of children of the less fortunate and the callousness of society towards them.

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Our grateful thanks to staff, volunteers and friends who helped to make this volume possible.

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When it happens The day begins at 8 a.m. After cleaning and setting up the centre, the staff visits homes to collect children and meet parents. Cleaning/ bathing of the children is followed by milk, games and prayers. From 10 a.m. to midday, there are organised acitvities for each age-group; at noon, a supplementary mid-day meal of porridge with vegetables for all and special nutritive diets for the malnourished. The afternoons are spent informally—arts and crafts, music, drama, gardening, story-telling and reading followed by games and sports till the centre closes at 4.30 p.m. After 7 p.m. the staff hold literacy classes for both men and women, for two hours, five nights a week.

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Editorial

The theme of this issue of EKALAVYA is the education of adults. It might, at first sight, seem a strange theme to choose for an organisation which calls itself MOBILE CRECHES FOR WORKING MOTHERS' CHILDREN. Yet Mobile Creches' involvement with adults has been present from the very start. Adults surround the child and create the world in which the child lives. Their fate determines his. It was the plight of the migrant construction mother, no less than that of her child, which stimulated the first tentative response which was later to grow into an organisation.

Who are adults, anyway ? In India, among the poor, adulthood begins at about fourteen, and in many instances earlier. Childhood is a luxury the poor can ill afford. Responsibilities come early—who has not seen the six-year-old struggling bravely with another little one on the hip or the ten-year-old 'little mother' managing an entire family ? By fourteen, most boys in the unskilled labour category are into the work force, and the girls well married before the onset of puberty, at sixteen or seventeen mothers, by twenty often experienced mothers of two or more ! These are the young adults, parents or siblings, amongst whom the child lives and grows up.

In this context, child care, for the very young, seemed a concrete response—it helped the child to develop while it relieved the parents. Soon, it began to be seen that work with adults was a necessary part of the programme—and a network of services for adults were slowly built up centering always around education, and the possibilities for creating a better environment for the child, within the limitations of poverty and mobility. Thus began a slow process of creating awareness, and through awareness, the potential for growth.

Can a study of this process help ? Can we compare our experiences with those of others ? What lessons do our experiences hold for educators everywhere ? This issue not only documents some aspects of the process of Adult Education undertaken by Mobile Creches itself, but also records the experiences of some others who seem to share approaches and methods. Perhaps the closest in some respects is the experiment of Abner Memorial School—because it began with children. It uses children as instruments of education for other children—the drop-outs, and in this way contributes to the development of two groups of children, the more and the less fortunate. Here too, slowly, adults were drawn in at both ends—as workers or volunteers on the one hand, enrolled in classes on the other. The problems and the similarities emerge. Going further afield, the Bettiah programme describes the potential force for social change hidden within a programme that creates awareness, and also the problems, the struggles and the difficulties on the way. What are the inputs needed to sustain such a venture, and how far can it go ? The article on the use of the mother-tongue in literacy programmes is far from irrelevant—it brings us right back to the heart of the educational programme—the attempt to use literacy teaching as an educational device. What are the pitfalls and the dangers the unwary are exposed to, as our implicit assumptions get built into the curriculum that we devise for educating others ? Awareness is needed here too, at the level of the curriculum designer, to overcome the bias of the 'educated' and learn to do what is necessary in the context of the needs of the adults we are talking about. The experience of the Chipko movement, at first sight, seems to have little to do with adult education as such. But, in fact, besides illustrating once more the power and strength of the aroused, it also stimulates reflection on the methods by which the awareness was aroused. What strategies of informal education led to such awakening ? How were the women organised and led ? The answer is—by a leadership which is hardly visible, which melts into the background, a leadership which is no longer necessary precisely because it has been so successful in creating strength among the led. Tolstoy once defined education as the process of removing inequality between teacher and taught—the more successful the process, the smaller the gap; and when true equality is achieved, who is the teacher and who the taught ?

All these illustrations point once more to the role that education plays in the creation of social movements. This needs to be said now at a time when many question the value of adult education. It has been termed an irrelevant or pitifully inadequate response by those who would prefer to go directly to the question of organising the poor to fight against an unjust and exploitative system. Forget about education and organise, they say. Take the long road, say the educators, and the people will organise themselves.

Which is best ? Can we do both ?

It seems that a concern for *process*—for the *how* of education, for the many paths to the goal, and the hidden pitfalls of each—holds together these seemingly disparate descriptions.

Perhaps looking closely at the process may get us nearer to the goal than looking airily heavenwards. From this standpoint, the following pages should provide both insights and inspiration. □

Mobile Creches

Needs your help :

Rs. 50/- Per month would look after day-care services for a child. Your donation would go to a Sponsorship Fund.

Rs. 200/- Would buy medicines for a month for 50 children.

Rs. 510/- Would buy a sewing machine to be used by the older girls in a sewing-cum-literacy class.

Rs. 580/- Would buy a cycle to be used by one of our health workers who have to commute between three or four centres.

Rs. 2,500/- Would provide running costs for a centre of 50 children for a month.

Rs. 7,000/- Would fully equip a centre for 50 children.

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Adult Education in Mobile Creches

An Overview: 1969-82

The growth of Adult Education within Mobile Creches has mirrored in many ways the growth of Mobile Creches itself—each began as a spontaneous response to a perceived need. Mobile Creches' programme grew out of one person's perception of the needs of neglected children on construction sites. Almost from the beginning, it became clear that the young child was the most unreachable member of the family—to be reached only through the adults in the family. To do something useful for the child, the confidence of the adults had to be won, they had to be understood and identified with; only then could action become meaningful. From this one insight, and the desire to communicate with the adults that arose out of it, grew the rest of the Adult Education programme.

Communication in Mobile Creches has always been seen as a two-way process—on the one hand, the need to learn more about the community, their problems, life-style, habits, aspirations and difficulties; on the other, the need to help, by teaching and demonstration, to find ways in which they could provide a better environment for the growth and development of their own children. The communication, too, was a child-centred one—the objectives were clear from the start. The educational programme for adults was to support and strengthen the programme for children. Characteristic, too, of Mobile Creches was the method adopted—a series of experiments, struggles, attempts to start from scratch and to learn from experience; an unwillingness to adopt ready-made solutions; stress on the most practical and feasible methods and a determination to solve problems as and when they arose; training by the more experienced passing on their learning to the less; learning about the community not by formal surveys and studies but by a long period of close

interaction and sympathetic identification; and a carefully worked out administrative structure to support the field worker.

The early years

From the beginning, there were two thrusts: the formal one of teaching the basics of literacy and numeracy through classes and the informal approach of communicating ideas through group interaction. Both were seen as ways of reaching the adult worker, living in a small enclosed world out of the reach of most media, walled in by fear and suspicion born out of past experience.

The shape of the programme in its early years has been documented in *Ekalavya* 1976. The lessons of these years were several, the problems many; the main one being caused by the lack of continuity in formal instruction because of the extreme mobility of construction labour from site to site within the city, as well as the turnover resulting from visits to the village, the long hours and fatigue, the interruptions caused by spells of overtime work whenever materials were available, alternating with periods of slack; the nature of the construction industry made it difficult to run a consistent instructional programme, to evaluate or to follow-up. With such a background, how to make people literate within a fixed period like six months or ten months as advised by the pundits of literacy ? And if they were made literate, how to provide a moving population with reading matter to keep up all too easily lost skills?

Another point of view questioned the very relevance and utility of what was being taught—did formal literacy help these men and women concretely to better their lives in any way? How were they better off as a result? Would it not be wiser to forget formal teaching and concentrate on life skills, and if so, which ones? Still a third area of difficulty was combating the indifference and lack of cooperation, sometimes hostility, of the employers who often tended to see Adult Education classes as a means of arousing or even organising the labour on their work-sites. Time and time again, requests to support or even provide shelter for a night class have met with refusal from the same persons who are willing, if not eager, to help support and run the child care centre for the children of the same labour. If the purpose of Adult Education is to stimulate 'critical reflection' and enable people to improve their own lives, the subject matter for reflection cannot be dictated. It is impossible to prevent people thinking about their work, which might lead sometimes to just what the employers feared. How then to encourage education and freedom of thought, while maintaining the goodwill of employers, without whose support the programme would cease ?

The second phase of Adult Education in Mobile Creches has tried to tackle these problems by setting itself limited goals, working for small gains and shunning large ambitions, by seeking specific answers to specific problems, breaking up each problem into manageable units, experimenting with a variety of methods and media and subjecting each to evaluation; above all, by sensitising field workers to the problems as much as possible, so that they are enabled to evaluate, to handle feedback, to suggest solutions and to carry them out, rather than be mere passive agents implementing a ready-made programme. The first new development after 1976 was the beginning of Lok Doot, the germ of the educational drama troupe, whose story is told elsewhere (page 43). Other experiments followed.

Today, the Adult Education programme can be considered in five main aspects:

(1) Literacy classes for men and women using a curriculum and a set of instructional materials developed specifically for this community;

(2) Post-literacy work, with a set of materials developed for this community in addition to conventional and available materials;

(3) Communication through drama, performing arts and audio-visual media;

(4) Communication through group meetings of various types—ranging from demonstrations and film shows, to fairs, exhibitions and melas;

(5) Intensive education through 'camps' or short-term exposure to a concentrated mix of methods for a specific purpose.

Underlying all of these, is the approach which sees training as the core of the programme. The training

structure and schedule works both as a means of gathering data and feedback, developing and testing out new methods and evaluating them and as a means of extending their use in the field. The two-way reliance on the field worker working in close collaboration with specialists has given the programme its special character.

A curriculum for literacy

What does a construction worker like to talk or read or write about at the end of a long hard day—especially the women who have also had to cook and feed the family before they come into the class at 7:00 p.m.? And what is it easiest to talk or teach about? What would motivate him or her to learn to read? Would pictures help? Should one concentrate on the immediate surroundings or try to be a 'window on the world'? Looking at these questions, and looking at what was available, it seemed that the typical rural-based textbooks emanating from Literacy House in the 60s and 70s, and aimed at U.P. farmers, were too remote to arouse interest. Besides, they all assumed that men should learn about farming, seeds, fertilisers, irrigation and what-have-you, related to agriculture; every primer addressed to women spoke only about home, hearth and child. But in Delhi the women on construction sites worked a full day on the site, and brought home half or almost half of the family income—they were interested in prices, markets, medical facilities, work opportunities, travel, clothes, tools and a variety of other things. On the other hand, if the men did not get into the habit of thinking about children's nutritional or health needs, and left it all to women, they might not permit or help their wives to do what the wives might know should be done. Decision-makers in the family are still largely the men—so why not enlarge the dimensions of their thinking to include such considerations? After all, our objective was always to provide for better child education and care, and the role of the father was very important.

So from discussions with men and women, from anecdotes told by them, from a study of their living conditions, diet and habits, from their vocabulary and their jokes and their songs—all collected by the staff, came the content for the first draft of our primer *Apni Baaten*, the first (at the time) unisex literacy primer! And it can be said with assurance after four years of use with both

sexes, acceptable to both ! The subjects : work on the construction site, food and nutrition, health, immunisation, care of the pregnant and the new-born, sanitation, life in the labour camp, feasts and festivals, marriage rites, finances.

The linguistic order : the ten most commonly found consonant sounds in Hindi, and the three most commonly used vowel signs (matras). An innovation was bringing in the ī sign in the second lesson, to enable feminine conversations in a natural style. A set of 20 picture charts in stylised form were made, around these themes to stimulate discussion and concentrate attention on the words to be learned. Later, with their use, came the discovery that, though fun to use for general discussions, they were not much use from the point of view of literacy ; they distracted attention from the main point. Also, side by side, came the insight that adults could do as well, perhaps better, without too much illustration. Reduced dependence on pictures leads to quicker mastery of the letters and the skill of deciphering.

The primer itself was first tested out in the form of cyclostyled sheets by the same staff who gathered the material. When published, it fell into two parts—the first, only 16 pages long, contained ten consonants and three matras, enough to make sensible sentences, and paragraphs, and reading and writing meaningful, while at the same time giving the self-confidence of easy mastery. The second, 48 pages long, contains the rest of the alphabet, and the rest of the subject matter, but can now be tackled by an adult who already knows the mechanics of learning to read new letters and sounds, and who can progress that much faster. Yet another discovery—it takes learners only a fraction more time to complete Book II as it does to complete Book I. Along with Book I, then, came the need to provide reading matter based on a limited number of letters—a series of work cards, slogans and even tiny poems was the response of the staff. The charts gradually came to be less used, except on special occasions to introduce or enliven a new lesson, but soon a need was felt for workbooks

and more practice material. The staff have constantly to learn how to work with the materials so that each person in the class can go at his or her own pace, using several materials, and not to depend on classroom rote teaching, except on occasion. A strong need has been expressed by them for a similar set of materials on practical numeracy which is still being taught using the strategies, ideas and aids found useful with children during the day in the day-care programme. These clearly need adaptation for adults.

Now too came the realisation that a different selection of initial words could have made the course go faster—but there are so many other factors affecting the speed of literacy learning that it has not seemed worthwhile to change the entire course ; for instance, women who attend the classes are generally much slower in their progress than the men. The reasons ? Less time, more fatigue, more cares and worries, less time to practice, and above all, most of them have never had any earlier exposure to schooling as children while some of the men have. With that to contend with, it seems more important to have a sympathetic and persistent teacher, good lighting, time to practice, a lively classroom and adequate materials than a perfect text-book.

The same materials have also been used in the last few years with two other groups—the teenage girls in slums who have dropped out of school or never been to school and who attend sewing classes which motivates them slowly to learn to be literate as well ; and the older creche workers in Mobile Creches who have never had any formal education or had it so long ago that it has fallen into disuse. For both these groups, the primers provide not only literacy but an introduction to the same useful subjects. To the staff it seems that they need more time, more aids. and more knowledge of how to use the textbook. Ultimately, it does not matter what textbook is used—how it is taught is more important that what is taught. Perhaps because the textbook is not smug or condescending it helps the teachers not to be so either. A warm, friendly, helpful teacher who relates without pretensions to the adults is the best motivator. Training staff in building and maintaining good relations has been given more stress than drilling them in skills of instruction.

Post-literacy—or why learn to read ?

Once an illiterate person has mastered the mechanics of reading, what is there for him to read? Why should he learn at all ? Most neo-literates quickly lose their skills if they do not have sufficient material to practice on and keep up their learning—this means it must either give them knowledge that they wish to have or be intrinsically interesting. Because technical knowledge can be acquired in many other ways than by reading, intrinsic interest is very important. Reading can help to remind and fix in the memory. So what do they read, what *can* they read ? The daily newspaper ? Early on, we found that the language of newspapers is too complex, too literary, too full of big Sanskritised words to be meaningful, and besides, the print is usually too small. Attempts to write up a wall newspaper in simple language and bold print were made, but given up after some time. There was too little time for the staff to carry out so many activities. The newspaper is, instead, read out every evening at the end of the class, and sometimes discussed. This implies that staff have the skills to read aloud, to select news and to interpret, and later on to lead a discussion.

What kind of news is most appreciated ? Observation has shown that it is the weekly future forecast, information about weather and prices, health tips, and gossipy or sensational news items that lead in interest. Political news at a national level gets some polite attention but not in detail. As local news about the areas where people come from is not available, generally news-reading settles for these items. Weekly magazines too are available in the library of the centre. Again, most of them are couched in language and style unsuitable for the neo-literate. The children's magazines, especially the stories, are the most popular and are most read by the teenagers.

Then comes the library itself, which consists of a small selection of simple books built up over the years. Here again, sad to relate, the bulk is made up of children's books, as nothing for adults existed till very recently. Which have been the most popular books in the library, most used and borrowed ? Fiction leads the way, with folk stories, tales and short stories, the first. Novels are too long and difficult. Popular science, biography and the typical moralistic inspirational literature which

is considered suitable for adults arouse very little interest. Polite noises are made, but few people want to borrow a biography of one of the national heroes. Informative literature is usually far too dull. So slowly began our attempt to strengthen the reading matter for adults in the same way, using the same methods—drawing upon the experience of the staff to build up literature which would be interesting to adults, within their scope and ability in terms of difficulty, but not condescending in tone or addressing children—literature which would inform, motivate and guide with enjoyment, which would be fun enough for people to borrow and read and borrow again or best of all even take away, for the only kind of theft which might be acceptable is the theft of books, born as it is of a hunger for knowledge.

The hunger for knowledge

The first nine publications were developed with this approach—topics were discussed and selected at meetings of the staff, drawing upon their experience and testing it out against the experience of their colleagues; then one of them, more gifted than others in the art of writing, would undertake to write it up ; at the next meeting, it would be read out and discussed and debated by colleagues, keeping in mind the possible reactions of the adults; sometimes, in fact, the debate grew directly out of actual field experiences in discussing similar topics. For instance, one of the stories so developed was on the evils of the dowry system. One of the staff reported that in a discussion the general reaction had been in terms of a practical understanding of how society works ; the women had all said that to live in society one had to follow the ways of society and if it was necessary to give dowry you gave it ; otherwise how would their sons and daughters get married at all ? Social reform and experimentation, they felt, were all very well for the privileged few or the middle-class to try out ; for them conformity was their lot. This was a typical reaction. Nevertheless, the story was printed and has been much used in classes as a basis for discussion. For it is still possible to demonstrate that alternatives exist.

At this stage, staff are involved in a different way. In the writing stage, they provide the vital feedback. In the reading stage, they are discussion leaders. As each book was introduced into the library an intensive series of workshops took place to guide staff on discussion methods. The topics chosen: the causes of disease, the unity of religions, child marriage, dowry, bonded labour, untouchability, blood donation and legislation for unskilled labour. Unsurprisingly, it was found that the books cast in a fictional or dramatised form were more popular; the straight informative texts, like the ones on labour law or health were less so, though illustrations helped considerably. What was most moving was to see visible demonstrations of the 'hunger for knowledge'. On many work sites, a late evening visit would reveal men and boys crouched in the light of street lamps poring over their newly-acquired books. Following the 'take-home' plan most of the books have been given away as prizes along with certificates of literacy. With a migrant population, this means that most of the books have vanished and the shelves are empty in two years. It is difficult to say exactly how much they have been read and used, but from the signs we have seen, it is considerable.

The second series of books have gone a step further, involving the readers themselves in discussions even at the writing stage. This provides feedback even on points like suitable vocabulary, length and clarity. The decision has been to attempt to convey ideas within a narrative or dramatic framework, since this seems to be the kind of material most enjoyed, and to provide exercises, questions and points for discussion at the end to keep up the knowledge and cognitive activity. At the same time, straight information will be given in anthology form like collections of recipes, or first aid measures. Since print is a long-lasting and easy to carry about medium, and several people can have access to one book, it seems that this is a very important means of keeping communication open and providing inputs. Perhaps, in the long run, the humble print medium is a more powerful one than even the more attractive and noisy but ephemeral one of drama.

Communication through audio-visual media

An account of experiments in the use of drama for communication has been given separately, so it will not be repeated here. The attempt here, too, has been for a two-way channel—drawing the themes, the materials, the ideas and the problems from the lives, hopes and problems of the

community, drawing too, upon their rich store of speech, music and dance ; and then trying to use the arts as a mirror through which people can look at life from a distance, study it and learn lessons which they can apply later, keeping the fun element throughout. The attempt has not always succeeded; sometimes the message is lost in the 'noise'; sometimes the message is too complicated to be put across naively and needs further splitting up; sometimes the medium is too powerful, sometimes not good enough, practised as it is by amateurs; sometimes the 'alienation' is too little, sometimes too much. But through all this, the approach has been consistent: first the impression and from it the feedback leading to the product which tries to educate, be it song, drama or scroll; then its use in the field followed by discussion, evaluation and constant reminder. From mere entertainment, drama in Mobile Creches has come to be a tool for communication.

Non-formal education in the group

From the beginning, the literacy class was seen only as one of the many ways to reach people— the non-formal approach started with the simplest and most effective one, face-to-face or one-to-one. This is still the best, perhaps the only way to build up relationships, confidence and trust. Mobile Creches workers still go from hut to hut in the camp-site every morning, meeting mothers and fathers and others in the labour camp, enquiring about each one, getting to know people, winning their affection. Still, too, parents drop in at the centre during the day or at night for a consultation on some point or the other. Much information is given informally while mothers come to breast-feed infants or men drop in for first-aid or an aspirin. This forms the heart and core of the exchange of ideas. But a need for group interaction to discuss matters of common concern and to convey ideas and information of common interest is also necessary. Group meetings for women have been arranged from almost the beginning. These still continue, approximately once a month at each site. The topics : child care, hygiene, how to avoid illness, sanitation, care of the newborn, why a balwadi is necessary, sending children to school, festivals, recipes, nutrition. The same topics are repeated every year but the audience is usually a new one. Increasingly the meetings are enlivened and supported by a puppet show, an entertainment by the children, a film or a nutrition/ cookery demonstration or exhibition. Meetings are at night or during the day, according to the women's convenience. Sometimes problems are discussed, collections are made to improve the centre, an excursion is planned or a festival communally celebrated and where the subject is one of wider interest, parents of both sexes join in. Film shows are even more popular, but the film as an educational medium has its drawbacks. Where a thought-provoking film like *Manthan* was available it was screened at each site and each screening was followed by group discussion the next day. However, it was discovered that unless people have been in the habit of discussing films and books they are unable to comment much, particularly on a long feature film where often the entire story has to be recapitualated in detail before a discussion of implications can be attempted. More intensive use of films is preferable, in theory, but has been little used because of the problems of time, gadgetry, availability of staff and so on. If a film is screened for a small group, the entire community bursts in to see it, especially if it is a feature film, and no one can be kept out. This makes the atmosphere hardly conducive to serious viewing. If the entire film is shown at one sitting, there is no time for discussion. If the film is shown over several days different audiences are viewing the film on each day. At the end of the show, usually no one is ready to sit around for discussion. These are some of the reasons why the film as an educational medium is so limited. To be effective, it needs an intensive use which circumstances do not permit.

Another non-formal approach which has proved of value is the 'mela' or fair. Originally, it was held for children only during the day, but has now become a community affair in the late evening or on a holiday. The 'mela' is entirely arranged by the staff and the children, with very little help from the adults who are usually too busy during working hours to be able to find time to help. It includes all that a traditional 'mela' does but with a strong educational component; there are food and snack stalls, but all of a special character, selling snacks of a nutritive type; there are things for sale, but these may be either objects made by the children, or developmental toys for children or old clothes; there are games of skill and chance,

but all with some scientific or other knowledge content built into them; there are entertainers, but the puppeteers and magicians also weave their shows around educational themes; there is usually a small exhibition of work done by the children, and a performance by them; and sometimes there is a 'do-it-yourself' corner where parents can do things themselves like make clay toys, kites, floor designs, flower garlands, or other traditional folk arts and activities of the area. Parents usually contribute in cash or kind to the 'mela', other than what they spend there as visitors; parents from several nearby work-sites are visitors whenever such a 'mela' is held at one site. The entire 'mela' is an educational event. Providing messages of an educational nature at so many points makes the whole business a complex one, dependent on the skills and knowledge of the staff who are handling it. Such a programme cannot be controlled. At any given point what gets across is no more and no less than what staff there can and do succeed in doing. This is the crux of the problem of Adult Education —who is doing it, and how? The fifth area illustrates this even more fully.

Intensive education—the camp experience

The camp experience is more than an educational pressure-cooker—it is a very intense emotional experience, an unforgettable one, for the participants, the labour as well as the staff, and few emerge from it unchanged in perspective and outlook. The first intensive camp for labour was held in 1980. It was a mere two-day affair, in which a group of 25 men from various work-sites and about seven staff took part, and was repeated for a similar group within a week—thus including 50 labourers and about fifteen staff altogether. Its intensity was its strength. From the moment they set out at the bus terminal to the moment they returned, the participants sat, ate, slept, talked and worked together, influencing each other immeasurably and forging close and solid emotional links. A structured series of games, exercises, talks and activities led them imperceptibly into discussion of major problems and suggestions for solutions. This formed the intellectual content of the camp, mixed with local sight-seeing, entertainment and, of course, camp chores. The place chosen was Garhmukteshwar, because of its proximity and the facilities available; also, truth to tell, because it is a well-known pilgrimage centre and everyone was eager to visit it. Some of those who attended the camp were temporarily unemployed, but several had given up two days' wages to attend, all other expenses being borne by Mobile Creches. The group was a mixed one in age, in occupation, in region. Discussions tended to be dominated by the older and more experienced and by the skilled workers like the masons, and carpenters, who were more articulate and used to conducting themselves in meetings. The ones who had least chance to express themselves were the young boys who had recently entered into the wage market as unskilled labour. The perception of the group of their problems was acute; they seemed to understand the structure of the Indian economy and their own role in it far better than the staff did. When it came to solutions, however, no easy answers were found. A need for unity and

organisation was strongly felt and expressed, but it was also realised that this would be defeated by mobility and the self-interest of the unemployed looking for a job at any cost. The strengths and weaknesses of the 'jamadar' system were weighed and on balance found advantageous. There was little trust in professional 'organisers', who were seen as exploitative and working for their own interests, or for political power. The concept that literacy and education could solve some of the problems was put forward by the staff, but not accepted with any enthusiasm—the idea that in the vast anonymous city of Delhi migrants in poverty could keep in touch and run an organisation through the post just did not appeal as being realistic. Nor did they see that being literate could help them to find work.
Following the camp, a series of follow-up meetings were planned to develop and work out the actions suggested. And this is where the rot started—the

tremendous solidarity built up in the camp evaporated, defeated by mobility and migrancy, the day-to-day pressures, the sheer inability to find the same people in the same place the next time. Groups broke up, new faces appeared at each meeting and it fizzled out in two or three months.

In the end it was not so much the heterogeneity of the group or the short duration of the camp, or the lack of concrete programme, as sheer circumstances which overpowered the purpose. In the first flush of enthusiasm, credit societies and mutual aid societies were formed, but as people drifted away these wound up. To discourage dependence and spoonfeeding, staff were asked not to become members of such groups, not to be responsible for safe custody of the money, not even to maintain the accounts, but only to act as guides and advisers. But without the close involvement of the staff, the momentum could not be maintained. This raises one of the most difficult questions in voluntary work : how much help and support needs to be given, in what form and when and how should it be withdrawn ? How does one locate that magical withdrawal moment at which one can vanish without causing loss or damage ? When is too soon and when is too late ?

The women's camp which was held a few months later, fell into a different kind of trap. Here the great achievement was the participation itself—that so many women were willing and permitted to join in an excursion, several carrying their babies with them, taking the first step in freeing themselves from the shackles of the immediate family and their responsibilities towards it. A similar camp programme was worked out for the women, but a new phenomenon appeared. The women took little interest in the discussions and wanted to spend time in relaxation and entertainment. Perhaps because of the heavy double burden of daily life, entertainment was the major concern—the need to just get away from it all and enjoy freedom from chores.

Perhaps two days was too short a period for them to unwind and start speaking—pressure-cooker tactics do not suit everyone ! Also, there was a sense of bewilderment arising from lack of regular

opportunities to take part in groups, to be articulate and even identify problems verbally. Here too the younger ones were liveliest in their expression, but some of the older women provided forceful leadership in coming to decisions. A difference appeared between the working wives and those who could afford to be full-time housewives. The young mothers of young babies complained that others in the community were not interested in creches and gave little support. Diversity of interest made it difficult to arrive at common conclusions. It takes time and practice to learn to identify with other peoples' problems. Being more oriented to husband and family, for many of them it was a new experience to be asked to identify with a group and to think about common problems. Many were unwilling to commit themselves without consulting the men-folk; some feared the disapproval of the men. There was a general acceptance of the double role with an air of surprise that it could even be questioned. This was not a group about to get up and fight for their rights—they were too concerned with the struggle for everyday living. Several credit and discussion groups were formed as a consequence of the women's camp also, but met with the same fate as the mens' over a period of months.

The lessons of the camps were many; perhaps the main one was that while we could plan and create a worthwhile experience like this we were as yet unprepared for the kind of follow-up required to sustain the momentum, with an infra-structure of trained and committed workers whose experience and skills would be supported by the funds and the organisation required. In the meanwhile, the lesson was to seek simpler and more short-term goals, set sights lower, look for more limited gains. So a series of very short-term camps have been organised for small groups, since then, each for a specific purpose. These are intensive post-literacy camps, concentrating on teaching specialized skills. There is no travel, no elaborate paraphernalia, no entertainment. The groups meet in the evening for a four or five-hour late-night session, eating together and sleeping overnight in one of the centres; naturally, much informal discussion also takes place.

Before the camp is set up, there is a careful survey by the staff, individually, to determine needs, interests and priorities. It is almost a tutorial group. The first such camp took as its subject filling up specimen applications to obtain ration cards, as this was the immediate need at the time. Subsequent camps took up the procedure for opening and closing accounts and withdrawing money, for writing telegrams, filling other kinds of forms, sending money-orders. Only those who have already achieved some degree of literacy can benefit by these camps, but motivation is high and achievement encouraging. The businesslike atmosphere builds confidence in a structure that can serve needs without waste of time, and this may in time lead to the next step.

Camps devoted to more general themes, not dependent on literacy, are the next step, with topics like family planning, better nutrition, sanitation, etc. as themes. Day-camps are more convenient for women to attend, though it may involve for several of them sacrifice of their daily wage, and would have to be carefully planned to coincide with their period of unemployment. For the men, the late-night session is a relaxed and convivial affair, and there is no loss of time. The proven practical usefulness of such camps alone can generate sufficient interest to power a more permanent and broad-based organisation.

The first-line communicator

In all our efforts, in success or failure, in bringing change, growth and development, the key to the entire process is the worker—whether called teacher, instructor, worker, or guide. It is the young men and women who communicate directly and at the first level with the men and women on the work site who matter. They are the staff of the Mobile Creches, the Adult Education workers. It is their knowledge, their motivation, their insights, their limitations, their strengths, which determine what will ultimately happen—centralised direction, or excellent materials and far-reaching objectives, alone, cannot go far. It is a truism in education to say that everything depends on the quality of teaching—but the statement is even more true in the complex area of communication and non-formal education, where so much happens beneath the surface which is not articulated, which people are seldom even aware of, but which influences the outcome so strongly.

Who are these people, the staff who work with adults ? In the daily interactions, the group activities, the fairs, demonstrations and meetings, almost all the staff are involved, though the older and more experienced play the more important and informative role. In the more specialised areas like literacy classes, nutrition and sewing demonstrations, camps, drama and audio-visual media, staff who have had specialised training in Adult Education and communication take the lead. But all are young people, mostly between 20 and 30 years old, drawn from the struggling lower middle-class, most of them having taken to this work wholly or mainly to earn a few rupees while unemployed or, if women, to help their families; yet most also, slowly drawn in, almost despite themselves, to deep involvement and interest (in time). Of those taking literacy classes, several are not Mobile Creches workers at all, but people employed in small jobs elsewhere who have come to know about the programme from friends or relatives and who have joined and stayed on for the same reasons.

Of the women, almost all are Mobile Creches' workers, those with the extra guts, or extra need, who are prepared to work a few hours more in the late evening of an already long and exhausting day. Their education has usually been of a poor kind, in schools of poor quality, and their qualifications low. They have usually never been exposed to informal individualized or innovative teaching methods themselves. In school life, they have rarely been asked to participate in a discussion or collect, interpret or evaluate information, or apply their own minds to academic problems. Yet here they are required to do so almost all the time. To some it is a challenge and an exhilarating one for others, it is a slow and painful process to learn to think. Their general knowledge, their perception of problems, their understanding are all conditioned by their own social and economic status. Close to poverty, they are quicker to see its ugly side than to respond to it as deprivation. Yet these are the people who are now asked not only think but to lead others in thinking, to lead discussion groups, to teach by inductive, pragmatic and learner-centred methods, to evaluate programmes in relation to goals, to offer new knowledge, when their own is often shaky.

A formal evaluation of Mobile Creches' Adult

Education programme conducted in 1979 by the Directorate of Adult Education helped to highlight many of these limitations. How often the literacy class became a formal class and the relationship that between teacher and student ; how often a discussion group became a lecture by the worker ; how often adults were being taught like children, because most of the workers were attuned to working with children the whole day long ; these weaknesses, sensed earlier, came to the forefront. It seemed that it was surprising that the adults learnt anything at all, in view of the poor teaching ! But on the other hand, came the strengths also, in contrast: how close and intimate the knowledge which the worker had about the adult and his community ; the equity and warmth in person-to-person relationships, the genuine concern; how much stress on helping individuals to master steps in learning; the stimulation and excitement of child-centred educational strategies. The implications were clear—the programme had strengths, but to build on them, training had to be still more intensified, exposing the first-line worker more and more deeply, challenging him or her to create afresh, helping them to understand by living through processes, that knowledge internalised alone changes attitudes, and attitudes once more externalized constitute behavioural change.

The sensitisation process

A typical illustration is the following. One of the picture charts developed in the series showed a family, consisting of a man, a woman and children sitting down to a meal in a circle. The chart was supposed to stimulate discussion about eating, and food in general, leading on to specific key words which would form the basis for the next lesson. But the important discussion point was supposed to be built around the question: do men and women eat together or not, and what are the nutritional consequences of each? It is likely that in the customary pattern of men eating first, often very little is left for the women, and this is one of the contributory causes for female malnutrition. The objective of the chart was to bring this idea to awareness. A mock discussion was conducted with the instructors, some of them role-playing the adults in the class, to establish this concept. All went smoothly for a while, and with firm conviction some of the staff, towards the end of the evening, were holding forth on the virtues of eating together in a family. It looked as if it would become a favourite lecture topic in the coming weeks, delivered with smug "I'm a teacher and I'm telling you this is how you should live never you mind how you do live" complacency. It all looked too perfect to be true.

Suddenly a disturbing thought occurred and the workshop organizer began to ask each one in turn how in fact meals were organized in their own homes. It turned out that of the fifteen people present, both men and women, twelve followed the traditional custom of the men eating first and the women later; the remaining three, of whom the leader was one, said that when living in the city (in the nuclear family) husbands and wives ate together, but they all reverted to the traditional practice when living in the extended family or on visits to rural homes. None could honestly say that they practised what they had been preaching enthusiastically for the last hour. Nor did they feel that they were going to change their life-styles as a result of that evening's discussion. Why then exhort, moralise, lecture and berate? If so ineffective in their own lives, would one evening's talk change the lives of the men and women they would talk to? Is all talk useless then? What was the purpose of the exercise, of education itself?

Slowly realisation dawned—the bringing to awareness of new insights, new possibilities, new alternatives, and more, the keeping in awareness by repetition and reminder, the sowing of the seed. But had the exploration not taken place right then and there, this understanding may not have come at all, or not for long; and so the path paved with good intentions would have led to bewilderment and disappointment as has happened in so many well-meaning programmes.

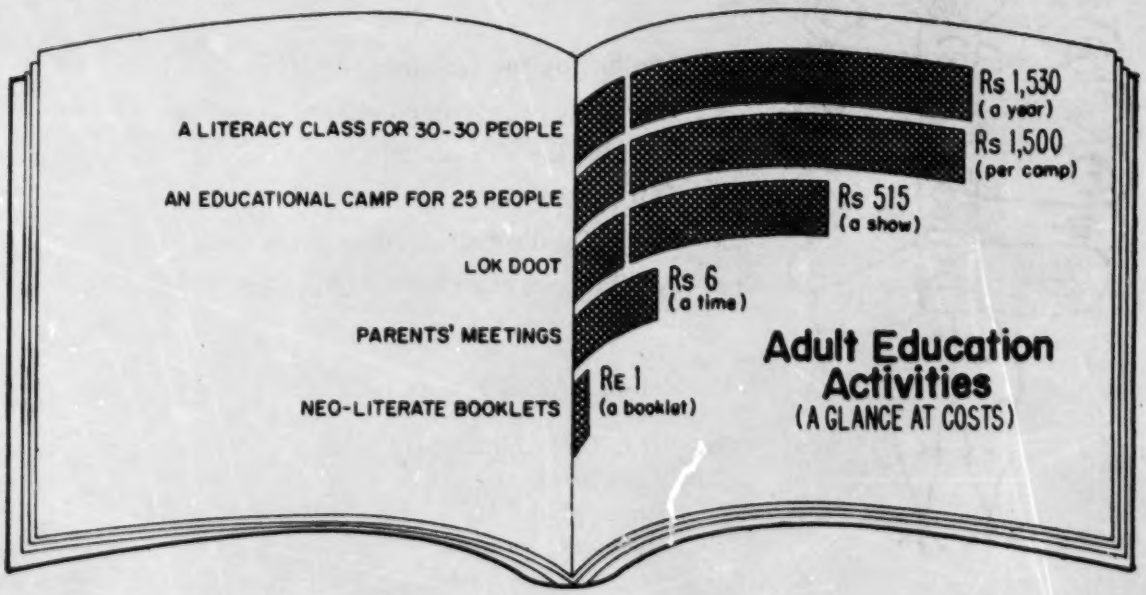
But knowledge is not the whole story. For even where knowledge exists, attitudes do not change, and practice is still more slow. Another illustration concerns a well-known plank of nutrition education—the importance of eating green vegetables, and leafy vegetables in particular. This was the theme of one of the most popular dramas staged by Lok Doot, which concluded with a tuneful lilting song that drove home the point, or so the composers thought. With pride one of them remarked at a meeting that the

song was on everybody's lips; quick came the reply from one of the doctors present at the meeting: "What's the use? They may all be singing the song, but it has not made one whit of difference to what they eat."

Stung perhaps by this remark, and also motivated by a long felt need to evaluate the impact of communication media, an action-research was carried out in 1980 (reported elsewhere) on the effectiveness of media for teaching about nutrition and health. One of the many discoveries that were made was that most people from a rural background knew all about eating greens, and in fact, regularly did so in the village. However, in their world, green leaves were things that you collected, gathered or obtained free in gardens, homes or by the way-side; it was never thought of as something to be bought with money in a shop, and they rarely went to the extent of buying leafy vegetables, as the middle-class do even at rising urban prices; though sometimes the women collected it when they could. So it seemed that even the song was unnecessary. Where knowledge is absent, it is relatively easy to provide it; where knowledge exists, attitudes are more difficult to change; when the problem is compounded by economics and inflation it becomes still more intractable. Nutrition education is far more than well-meaning organizers going about telling people what they should eat.

Yet another aspect of training has been in the perception of the role of drama as communication. At first, many of the staff viewed the drama programmes merely as entertainment, and often did not see how they were in any way involved with it, except of course, that as the providers of the entertainment, their status in the community would rise and they would benefit by the increased respect and affection people gave them. It took a long while and a series of exposures to discussions following drama for them to begin to think coherently about drama, and to be able to discuss it *themselves*, at their own level, to be able to be articulate about what they had seen and heard on the stage.

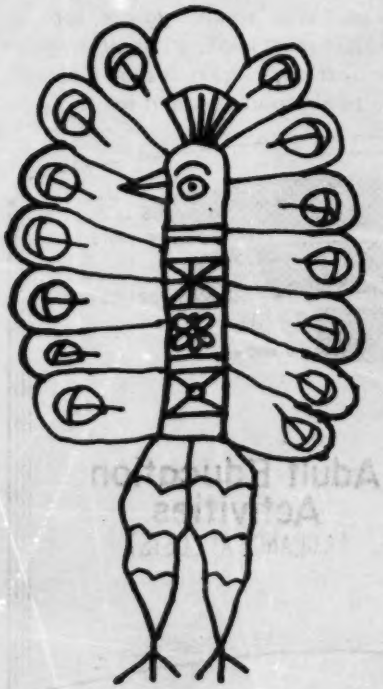
In the early discussions, questions tended to be answered literally and factually, and these were then the only kind of questions they themselves would be able to ask, leading merely to recapitulations of the story. The role of symbols, of character, of issues, of ideas, could not even be perceived at first. Skill in engaging in discussion must precede skill in leading it. So the sessions continued. But now some people got a new idea: if these were 'message' plays, then they must get across their message at once, and their work was simplified. If the play was 'about' hygiene, for instance, then people must know all about hygiene and its value the next day. Again, it took a series of discussions to begin to understand that only



very simple messages can be so conveyed, that even so repetition is necessary, that people may react against packaged messages, that discussions which highlight issues are important, and finally that even so, knowledge alone cannot lead to attitude change. In the area of complex life issues, drama plays a very different role. From the idea that drama provided a welcome change from the monotony of everyday life to the perception that it could be a sounding-board for life itself is a long road, and not all the staff have travelled the road yet.

Where are we going next ?

The idea of evaluation has caught on though—the idea that the educational process requires that each activity is thought out, prepared, and then reflected upon—is wholly accepted and in fact has even become something of a joke among the staff, who are fond of saying that in Mobile Creches it is impossible to even yawn without being promptly evaluated. So thorough has been the indoctrination in this regard, that in one recent instance, when for want of time the usual series of preparatory meetings could not be held before undertaking a certain activity, there was an outburst at the evaluation session, the activity was declared a failure and the cause of failure was clearly attributed to the lack of preparation. Yet these are people who are strangers to academic terminology. All such discussions take place in the discourse of everyday life. In this process, one more set of young adults have been educated, the educators themselves. So Adult Education is a many-layered process, one which affects all those who participate in it, the teachers, as well as the learners. The directions for the future of Adult Education in Mobile Creches are clear : hasten slowly; dig deep; explore all means. More specific programmes, tailored to needs, based on study and reflection; more exploration of the potential of each medium and mastery over its techniques; refinement of the communication media; more sensitisation to overcome the bias of the 'educated' towards the 'illiterate'—these are what need to be done. If it can be summed up, it would go like this : it is easy to teach, hard to stop teaching and let people learn. For that, one has first to learn; then learn to learn, then teach others to learn, and then wheel full circle, learn again. It is an upward spiral involving teacher and taught; perhaps twelve years of trial and error have helped to set feet firmly on it. □



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Communication, Media and Action Research

Mobile Creches in Delhi deals with migrant people from neighbouring States like Rajasthan and U.P., who have come to the city in search of work. Besides their mobility from the village to the city, the nature of their employment—unskilled manual labour on construction sites—is such that their movement from one site to another within the city is also quite rapid, depending on the availability of work. Considering this constant shift, how effective are the various parts of the Adult Education programme ? Mobile Creches attempts to reach the adult population through a variety of media, like the literacy class, the printed word, the drama, the group meeting, the camp and the individual contact. Which of these is the most suitable educational approach and in what proportions should media be mixed for greatest value ? The curriculum for the literacy programme is based on the needs and problems of the adults and is expected to be relevant to their daily life. But learning to read and write is a long and slow process, and many are unable to reach the goal. How effective is the curriculum itself as a means of creating awareness of problems and offering workable solutions ? Would it perhaps be more effective to concentrate on providing a variety of educational inputs, within a short span of time ? To find answers to some of these questions, an action-research study was carried out in 1980. The main objective was to study the extent of change in knowledge, attitudes and practices that may take place after an intensive four to eight week programme of educational intervention using a concentrated set of media. To do this, it was necessary first to study the awareness/information level of a group of adults *before* the intervention was carried out, and to compare it with the level *after* the educational intervention. It was also necessary to study the responses of two groups, one of which would be exposed to the intervention programme, the experimental group, and another which would be exposed to the usual programme for adults in all Mobile Creches centres, the control group. It was hoped that this approach would help to reveal something about the suitability of various educational methods. It was decided to work with about 100 adults in order to get some data useful for comparison. Right away, the study ran into problems. To select the experimental and control centres, the convenience and accessibility to staff who were going to carry out the programme had to be taken into account, and this limited the choice greatly.

Finding the sample

Next, in selecting the sample, it had to be seen that the adults had some contact with Mobile Creches in the past, but of not more than two years so that they would be representative of the population and not people who had already had special experience. With the women, it was necessary to leave out those with very young children or those who were pregnant, as in that case, their attendance and availability in the course of the intervention would be low, and they might even drop out. With all these precautions, 108 adults (51 men and 57 women) were interviewed at the beginning of the programme. The entire study in all its phases lasted only for four months. Even so, nearly 50% of the original sample had moved by the end of the period, and were not available for the concluding interview, without which comparisons could not be made. Research with migrants is full of such unpredictable risks, and circumstances beyond control. Long term studies can hardly be visualized.

The action-research was carried out in three parts. In the first part, the adults were interviewed by the staff, with the help of a questionnaire to find out the level of their awareness and knowledge about two specific topics, the importance of green vegetables and the importance of hygiene, personal and environmental. In the second part, the experimental group was exposed to an intensive programme of education through various media, on these two messages. In the third part, the same people in both groups were interviewed to find out if there had been any change in attitude, awareness and knowledge. It had been planned to have a fourth part, to be done after eight or ten months, to study how much of the new knowledge was retained and put to use, but since half of the sample had moved even before the end of the third part, it was impossible to carry out the last bit, and it had to be dropped.

Establishing the base

The kinds of questions asked in the interview were aimed at the following: to find out what people thought about the importance of fruits and vegetables in the diet, and particularly in the diet of children; to assess their understanding of the value of specific fruits and vegetables, and of their understanding of how to increase and conserve resources, and of proper methods of selecting and preparing vegetables. With regard to personal and environmental hygiene, the aim was to find out what they knew about the causes of infectious diseases, advantages of keeping selected parts of the body clean, the importance of keeping the environment clean, methods of disposal of household waste and methods of prevention of contamination of water, etc.

The experiment

In the second part, the two messages were communicated through various media over a period of six weeks to the experimental group. On Green Vegetables there were eight sessions, including a drama by *Lok Doot* on the theme, a discussion of the play, a song on the theme, card games using nutrition cards, a demonstration of how to prepare 'Paushtik Roti' followed by a discussion on it, a lesson from the primer on the same topic followed by discussion and an evening of games. On hygiene, there were six exposures including a scroll presentation on the theme by *Mini Lok Doot*, a discussion based on charts from the literacy course, a discussion with flash cards, a puppet play by *Lok Doot*, followed by discussion and a lesson from the primer on the theme followed by discussion. The staff were experienced and trained workers, members of *Lok Doot* and trainers in the Adult Education Programmes, so the level and intensity of teaching was higher than could be normally expected. At the same time the regular literacy classes for men and women continued. In the control group, during this time, one monthly meeting was held for mothers, in the usual way, but no special meeting was planned for the men. The men's literacy class went on, but the

women's class closed down halfway through the programme because of lack of staff.

In the third part, the same adults were interviewed (those who were available) after a gap of nearly two months to find out if there was any change in their knowledge and attitudes. The same questionnaire was used and the same staff did the interviewing.

What did we find out? A great deal, but not what was expected or planned. More was learnt from the standpoint of methodology and about how *not* to go about research studies than in terms of the answers originally sought. Also, more was learnt from the observations of the staff and the researchers who participated than from the formal questionnaires. On the data itself, no very clear picture emerges. On the whole, the scores of everyone went up, both men and women, both experimental and control groups. On the topic of Green Vegetables, women's scores rose much more than men's but as between experimental and control groups, there was not much difference in the improvement. On the topic of Hygiene, experimental scores went up much more than

control scores, but as between men and women there was little difference in improvement. Looking through the answers in detail, however, and remembering that only half the sample was available for comparison, and adding staff observations and comments many interesting ideas emerge. Starting at the baseline survey, a surprisingly high level of awareness was found. For instance, while most people were unable to specify the particular nutritional value of specifically named vegetables, they were aware of the nutritional importance of vegetables, and the main reason given for not eating them in larger quantities was the economic one, and the lack of time to gather leaves in an urban setting. The men's initial knowledge about nutrition was higher than that of the women. For hygiene, the initial level of both men and women were similar. But how do these findings stand up to scrutiny? Before the start of the programme, the staff had been given orientation about how to conduct the interviews, and later, many of the interviews were monitored by the researchers. However, the staff did have a certain bias towards the adults they were interviewing, particularly those whom they knew well, and this could have affected the result. In action-research, the advantages of working through the field worker who has a close everyday contact and understanding of the people whose responses are sought is undoubtedly an advantage in establishing rapport and gaining insights. As against this, there is the danger that accuracy suffers, they may put words into people's mouths, help them out, or indulge in wishful thinking. How much did people actually know? It is hard to say even now.

The next problem after subjectivity is that of attendance during intervention. How many of the people in the study regularly attended all the sessions of the intervention programme, and were their answers different from those who did not? Towards the end of the intervention, the severity of winter set in, resulting in low attendance. On the experimental site, construction was at an ebb and many people left for the village. With some persons, the staff did not know them well as they were not attending the regular literacy class, and so took considerable time to establish rapport and persuade them to come for all the sessions. For the women, the timing was inconvenient as often they would not have finished their cooking and household chores by the time the sessions

started. In such cases, the staff had one-to-one discussions with some of them, and this might well account for the high scores of some of the women. In the control centre, the women's class closed after a while because there was no woman teacher. No attendance record was kept of those who attended the meetings but not the regular classes, and no record was kept of the topics taken up or the discussions held, so comparison is difficult. Because of the distance of this centre, classes could not be regularly monitored by the researchers. In spite of several orientation sessions on the nature of the study, the staff at the control centre felt that they should also have a programme similar to that at the experimental centre, and that unfair comparisons were being made. In fact, they might have felt that their competence was being questioned.

The problem of time

Finally, came the problems associated with time. The follow-up study was done after little more than a month, which was far too soon to test whether people remembered what they had learnt. But the fear of losing the sample prompted this. Also, the same questionnaire was used both times, to simplify comparison. But this bewildered many, who wondered why they were being asked the same questions again and again. Some of them, though they knew the answers, answered the same question differently the second time, which is only human. Several topics which had been included in the questionnaire like weaning, and weaning foods, and methods of cooking, could not be taken up during the intervention even though planned because of lack of time, so there was no point in repeating the questions about them. Lastly, the topics were perhaps of more interest to women than men and this too affected the responses, and is perhaps why women fared better than men. The personality of individual teachers also affected the result, though every effort was made, by orientation sessions, to keep the inputs the same in both centres.

The message can vary

A factor which came up during the study and which had not been given much thought to earlier, was the variable effect of the media themselves. For instance, the drama always attracted the largest audience, as was natural. But which parts of the drama affected people, and how ? Were they getting the planned message, or something else ? How much of the message was lost by the weaknesses of the actors, all members of the staff, who were unable for various technical reasons to project ideas clearly, or who humanly got carried away and did the wrong things at the wrong time ? For instance, in one of the plays, the ostensible message of which was to explain the causes of infectious disease and how to combat them, there is a comic sequence in which one of the players mimes a visit to the field for the traditional purpose of relieving oneself. Usually, the actor is carried away by the humorous element and ends up by elaborating this sequence in great detail, keeping the audience in splits of laughter and engaging their attention entirely. But after the audience go home, do they remember the fat man carrying his 'lota', or do they remember the message ? Do they hum the song and forget the words ? How much detail is necessary, how much clogs up the circuits ? How far can the medium be distorted to convey a 'message' and in what form ? Are the values perceived the same as those projected, and the same as those originally planned ? These and similar questions have already suggested the next kind of research that could be usefully undertaken. For those working in Mobile Creches, the entire experience was an invaluable training. But the experience has meaning for a wider group—for those interested in social research involving human beings who can never be controlled in all the complexity of their daily life. For this kind of study, dealing with such sensitive areas as feeling, thought and value, it may not be worthwhile to try to engage in the conventional statistical manipulation of quantitative data, for here there are so many intangible variables which intervene to affect the outcome. To make sense out of it, a very different kind of study, of a qualitative type, which tries to look more closely and holistically at the persons being studied and the things which affect them, may be of more relevance.

Research : Ms. Yasmin Rahimtoolah guided by Dr. S. Anandalakshmy

Literacy— Through the Mother Tongue ?

The question of imparting literacy through and in the mother tongue of the learners has been discussed in detail in published literature for many years. Right from the UNESCO-organised conference of specialists in 1951 (published in 1953) which emphasized the need for the "use of vernacular languages in initial and adult education" to the realization that socio-cultural patterns of behaviour in the community can best be sustained and enriched through the mother tongue, the proposition has never been questioned in any significant measure. But there have been suggestions for reconsideration, rather than outright repudiation.

(i) It has been suggested, for example, that our current understanding of the nature of language and the process of language learning has been enriched to an extent where the focus has now shifted to motivation of the learner towards the learning of language promising upward economic mobility.

(ii) Situations of language learning and language use in multilingual societies have made the task of defining the 'mother tongue' quite complicated. Even the so-called monolingual and mono-cultural societies in the West are beginning to realize that multi-lingualism and multi-culturalism is more a rule than an exception.

Academic arguments notwithstanding, the intense reality of field-level convictions against the original proposition is worth analysing. During an instructors' training programme organised by Mobile Creches I encountered this conviction in quite a vehement form. I am grateful to the gentlemen popularly known as 'Masterji' who chose to articulate the opposition to the idea of literacy through the mother tongue. For academic purposes, we must make some distinctions between the differing interpretations of 'mother tongue' :

(i) the language in which a person first learns to formulate ideas,

(ii) the language which a person first learns to speak,

(iii) a language acquired in the early years,

(iv) a language which becomes a person's natural instrument of thought.

They want the best

However, the question, particularly at the field level, is not solely linguistic in nature; a wide range of social, economic and cultural considerations add up to strengthen a worker's perception of language choice for literacy. As it is, the 1951 UNESCO statement had been accepted almost as a sacred principle; what had been forgotten in the statement was the emphasis on 'always best', the notion of desirability, efficiency and speed in the learning task. The statement read: *"——in teaching adults to read it is always best for them to begin in the mother tongue."* 'Always best' seems to have become 'absolutely essential' in the last thirty years in academic circles. However, such academic faith has been totally ignored by practical constraints such as bulk printing, lack of trained manpower, scarce resources, etc. In this conflict between academic faith and pragmatics of the situation, the question of learners' perceptions, or for that matter the teachers' perceptions, have been somewhat ignored.

Three changes that seem to be gradually gaining momentum against the mother tongue principle are :

(i) the medium of instruction is not necessarily the primary variable in determining educational progress;

(ii) Initial/transitional literacy could be imparted through the mother tongue with a provision for a switch to a language for wider communication; and

(iii) in place of the mother tongue, literacy could be imparted in a language that the learner readily understands.

Beliefs about learning

The learner/worker perceptions need to be understood first, though. The following beliefs generally prompt the learner/field worker to lay high value on literacy through the language of wider communication :

(i) learning through the language of wider

communication would not pose any serious problems if the learner aptitude is favourable;

(ii) Socio-economic motivations in the learner prompt them to value the language of upward economic mobility, of work, more than the language of intimate and informal relationships. The response of the low-paid worker to the processes of modernization, as symbolised in the well-to-do, gets transferred to the language they speak.

The two situations described above are not mere figments of imagination. Intensity of economic deprivation often helps in the process of fostering positive attitudes to the learning of the language of wider communication. The rickshaw pullers in Delhi living in a Muslim Colony provided one of the numerous instances of such attitudes. The preacher at the mosque (the maulvi) wanted them to learn Urdu apparently to ensure their being good Muslims. The students from the local college could easily teach Hindi, while the rickshaw pullers wanted to learn English. They somehow felt that everyone who spoke English did well in life. The 'masterji' at the instructors' training programme also felt that the migrant construction workers should be taught standard Hindi if they had to do well in the city.

In these two instances, the notion of 'doing well' is primarily attached to progress in the domain of work. After all, people come to the towns and the cities in search of economic improvement. Why should the city not become a melting pot socially and culturally ? The Bundeli-speaking worker from Madhya Pradesh, or the Bhojpuri-speaking worker from Bihar would probably not mind his mother tongue not being used in the domain of work. Another side of the same story can be narrated from the planner's or the decision-maker's point of view. Why should the decision-maker choose to provide instruction in a language other than his own in which he himself has apparently done better ? Sometimes, non-existence of a script system for the mother tongue has facilitated literacy teaching in a second or third language. These notions have thus given rise to the practice of imparting literacy through the medium of a second or even third language. No comparative data is available to prove if more learners have learnt reading and writing skills through the mother toungue or second and third languages. The adaptability of the learner to local conditions, the intensity of motivation to success in the domain of work, and the extent of sustained political will which backs literacy/adult education programmes in each society are some of the important variables influencing this process.

Linguistic or socio-cultural considerations have often sought to obliterate the impact of economic forces in the choice of language for literacy. The task of learning has somehow been related to cultural liberation of the individual rather than to upward economic mobility. It so happens that the poor have stronger economic orientations in sight; cultural liberation seems to be less important. To the extent that socio-economic changes are less manipulable both by governments and individuals, the need for and the opportunity to use literacy skills cannot always be ensured uniformly among individuals and groups.

Is the oral medium enough ?

Additionally, the oral medium of language, either mother tongue or language of wider communication, has so far sufficed for the illiterate segments of society. Their communication needs have apparently been adequately met through oral language. The learning of additional skills (reading and writing) in the same language or in another language must first have its own justifications, economic justifications, if possible. Social and cultural patterns of behaviour are related to the amount of leisure available to a group of people and are often fulfilled through the oral medium.

In a paper issued by the UNESCO Regional Office for Education in Asia, it has been pointed out that: *"—in origin, the act of reading is an urban act. On the other hand, for thousands of years, and even today, in rural societies made up of villages often containing only a few hundred individuals, oral communication and face-to-face contact are sufficient for the multi-various relations of daily life. That is why illiteracy today is still first and foremost a rural occurrence. In a number of Asian rural societies, however, writing is by no means unknown. On the contrary, writing has existed and continues to exist as an*

institution personified by the scribe, which an illiterate person uses as a go-between to communicate with others at a distance. Unlike town dwellers, villagers do not feel the need to be able to read and write, because their everyday life and the conduct of their family affairs do not involve this need." (UNESCO, 1969).

The presence of such traditional modes of transmitting and interpreting written information often provides an alternative to the mode of individual literacy. What is often regarded as the norm in literate societies proves to be yet another deterrent to the acquisition of literacy through the mother tongue.

Even when such conflicting situations exist, the task of the literacy programme planners seems to be determined by the objectives they set for the programme. To the extent that the illiterate learner is a late entrant in the process of planned development and to the extent that the illiterate learner still conducts himself socially and economically in traditional societies through traditional (not modernized through technology) skills of production and service, the addition of skills of reading and writing may be determined by the relative importance the planners and the learners attach to the measure of articulation and confidence they want to generate. What modernized urban or town life requires is not just initial literacy but a specialised kind of literacy which may not be found even in highly literate people. There are thus stages in the acquisition of literacy. Initial literacy may still be easier in the mother tongue.

S.C. Bhatia

BOOKS FOR NEO-LITERATES

Mobile Creches has published a series of easy-to-read booklets on subjects of interest to adults, suitable for literacy classes and libraries. Put together by Adult Literacy workers, the basis for their composition has been group discussion. Orders for any of these books can be placed at our central office: Mobile Creches, 5-B, Telegraph Lane, New Delhi-110001.

HINDI PRIMER

	Rs. P.
Apni Baaten (Part I)	0.75
Apni Baaten (Part II) For women and men workers on construction sites.	2.00

OTHER BOOKS AVAILABLE

Apna Kam Apna Kanoon On laws relating to migrant labour.	1.50
Panditji Ka Kuan A true story on the fight against untouchability.	1.00
Chameli Ki Shadi A tale of child marriage.	1.00
Andekha Dost Andekha Dushman Information guide on communicable diseases.	1.00
Thakur Ka Beta Thanedar Describing a strategy to free bonded labour.	1.00
Samdhi-Samdhi A problem story on the theme of dowry.	1.00
Manzil Ek Rasta Anek A tract on the unity of religions.	0.50
Do Prasha Anecdotes for discussion.	0.50
Khoon dan A short story on blood donation.	0.50
Swarg Narak A fantasy on sanitation.	2.00
Vigyan Kya Hai? A tale defining science.	0.50

Adult Education for Social Change

Some thoughts on the work of the Bettiah Programme

Adult education—concept & policy

Adult education in modern India has a long, varied and often tortuous history on account of a number of well-known factors—our colonial heritage not being the least amongst these. Many individuals and organisations, struck by the scale of mass illiteracy in this land, have undertaken excellent work to combat what clearly seemed an impediment to progress and modernisation. Gandhiji himself stressed over and over again the vital need for involving the people in a programme of education which would reach down to the last man or woman in the remotest village. But despite all this, adult education continued to be neglected on a national level, and was left largely to the efforts, mostly sporadic, of individuals and voluntary organisations.

The 1978 policy statement of the Government of India on Adult Education is a milestone in this story; and indeed, in terms of official programmes, is a radical document which recognises, perhaps for the first time, the role of education in enabling the masses to play an active part in the shaping of plans and policies affecting their own lives. With generous financial allocations in the 5th plan—(this totalled 19 times more than similar provisions in all previous 5 Year Plans), and based on the concrete grass-roots experience of the field workers themselves, the conceptual framework and the assumptions on which it is based, bear repetition :

1. *that illiteracy is a serious impediment to individual growth and national progress.*
2. *that education is not co-terminous with schooling and that it takes place in most work and life situations.*
3. *that learning, working and living are inseparable and each acquires a meaning only when correlated with the others.*
4. *that the means by which people are involved in the process of development are at least as important as the ends; and*
5. *that the illiterate and poor can rise to their own liberation through literacy. dialogue and action.*

As part of Non-formal Education, therefore, adult education was to be *related* to the environment and learners' needs, *flexible* regarding duration and location, *diversified* in regard to curriculum, teaching/learning materials and methods and *systematic* in all aspects of its organisation. To quote again from the Policy Statement on NAEP, these were the salient features :

- *literacy with assured follow-up*
- *conventional functional literacy*
- *functional literacy supportive of a dominant programme*
- *literacy with learning-cum-action, and*
- *literacy for conscientisation and formation of organisations of the poor.*

The task was truly herculean in its dimensions, and, in the view of many, too unrealistic to ever be effectively followed—especially in its dream of involving and organising the masses in action to influence meaningfully, the gargantuan monster system which had functioned and would continue to function for the benefit of the few who controlled both resources and the decision-making processes. This then was the challenge before the country, the government, voluntary organisations and the many individuals whom the programme was to draw into its orbit .

Policy and practice

To what extent, if at all, has this national policy been implemented, and where are the instances of a successful linking of literacy with action programmes designed to shape or change people's life situations ? There are numerous Adult Literacy programmes being run in every corner of the country—for the most part they are conventional purveyors of literacy and numeracy ; occasionally, there is an input of craft or skill training with a view to increasing economic gain. It has been refreshing to come across a programme which has made a conscious attempt to move beyond the narrow interpretation of education as mere literacy, and has used literacy as a tool to :

1. focus attention and help people analyse the cause of their conditions of poverty and underdevelopment,
2. mobilise people into action to solve some of their urgent problems,
3. pressurise the government and other local agencies to take administrative action on such issues, and above all,
4. to do all this within the guidelines and parameters of government policy, and using government funds with all its inbuilt checks, balances and frustrations.

The background to the Bettiah programme

With Bettiah as the headquarters, the district of West Champaran in North Bihar is flanked by Nepal to the north and Uttar Pradesh to the west. Since 1929, the K.R. Educational Association—a voluntary organisation—has been engaged in developmental activities in this area. The levels of poverty and destitution in the rural area of this district have to be seen to be believed. A socio-economic survey of the area conducted in 17 contiguous villages spread over an area of 25 miles, revealed some alarming facts :

- Out of a total of 1018 families :
  359 (25%) are entirely landless
  384 (30%) own less than 1/2 acre
  131 (10%) own less than 1 acre
  17 families own more than 6 acres

- The percentage of female literacy is only 6.89% and 66% of children between the ages of 6 and 14 have never been enrolled in school.

- The average per capita monthly income is Rs. 29.24 or about Rs. 150/- p.m. for a family of five members.

- 6..6% get less than this figure; 49% are educated unemployed ; 49% live in 'kutcha' houses or straw huts.

The socio-economic lot of the Harijans, Dhangads, Mussahars and tribals, and the women especially, is desperate. In certain 'tolis' or villages, the women earn a mere Rs. 1.75 as daily wage, while the men receive Rs. 2.50. In villages like Nookhap and Badonia, not a single woman is literate. Life expectancy among women is also woefully low.

Rural Development Programme, Bettiah

Starting with a small programme of adult education in just three villages in 1974, the RDP team (an inter-religious and inter-communal locally educated youth group) realized very early that merely running a literacy centre would serve no purpose in an area beset with such major social and economic disabilities. To be effective, such a programme would have to be need-based, functional and linked directly to the people's lives and problems. This growing conviction coincided with the launching of a nationwide assault on the problems of illiteracy and poverty.

Beginning with six, and extending to 23 contiguous panchayats—'literacy, functional efficiency and social awareness'—became a catchword in an area embracing some 300 villages. Close contacts already existed with the people owing to years of of involvement by K.R. Association in flood relief and other related programmes. These contacts were now strengthened by an intensive motivational drive through village meetings, personal visits, talks and discussions by government and other local officials, dramas, songs, and house-to-house visits. The selection of personnel from local communities also gave an additional impetus and credibility to the group who were able to persuade them fairly easily to participate in an educational programme especially designed for their needs.

Organisation

In 1979-81 the RDP set up one hundred adult education centres, and in 1980-81 this grew to 200 centres, all funded by the Ministry of Education and Social Welfare. They also organised 65 mobile libraries which could assist in the programme of follow-up. While setting up the centres, the RDP, from experience, tried as far as possible to follow the pracice of selecting such individuals as instructors who were acceptable to the learners, belonged to the same socio-economic background and also to the same village or toli. The actual classes were conducted for two hours a day and for six days a week. By mutual consent it was decided that one day in the week would be set aside exclusively for 'cultural programmes' with role plays, bhajans and discussions based on social awareness and problems affecting the people. They now have a repertoire of some 15

role plays, a 2-1/2 hour long drama, and about thirty songs in local dialect all composed and written by the workers themselves along with the learners at their centres. On this day groups from nearby centres come together, rotating their venues from centre to centre. Whenever attendance in the centres fell, these cultural programmes and public meetings acted as a stimulus and motivation.
But all this still sounds routine and should be normal to any efficiently organised programme. What makes the Bettiah programme different?

The Chetna Sangh

The policy statement speaks in unambiguous terms of —'literacy for conscientisation and formation of organisations of the poor'. How can this be done ? RDP team members, through their own work, experience and understanding of some of the causes of poverty, soon realised that in order to develop a similar critical awareness among the people, there was a need to evolve a complementary structure in which the instructor could also play the role of social animator. In such a forum those who were interested in deepening this process of education in its widest sense, could come together to share and discuss common needs and problems, identify causes and work out strategies for action. Thus was born the Chetna Sangh or Awareness Group—an organisation of the people for the peaceful redressal of injustices done to them, and also a general forum for discussion, which forms the very core of the Bettiah RDP. These Chetna Sanghs have become the base, both for Adult Education activities, and also for follow-up programmes like getting loans from the Bank of India, Grameen Bank, etc., help from the BDO and other Agricultural Extension services, or getting information about self-employment schemes.
Today there are 275 Chetna Sanghs in the area, with the adult learners forming the core at the village level. Linkages have been formed whereby instructors from a cluster of 13-14 centres are grouped into regional or Kshetriya Chetna Sanghs. These have been further linked together into one Super Chetna Sangh—thus forming a three-tier system interconnecting all the Sanghs.

Function

These Chetna Sanghs have grown into local watchdogs ; they are people's organisations for corporate action for the common good. They also form the base for continued education among those adults who have attained certain literacy levels after 10 months. The 7 Kshetriya Chetna Sanghs meet every month in the same region, but in a different village each time, with preference being given to that village where problems on wages, or land disputes are most pressing. At these meetings the problems are noted down, tentative solutions planned, with a concrete time-table and strategies for their immediate implementation. Whenever required, all members of the Kshetriya Chetna Sangh also congregate in the village on a fixed day, so as to lend their collective voice and weight in finding answers to specific situations, like long-standing disputes over land.

Case studies

So far, some twelve major, and over a hundred minor, village struggles and disputes have been peacefully settled through the action of Chetna Sanghs in cooperation with local Panchayats.

(1) Minimum wages

Landless labourers in the villages of Jaynagar and Jagdishpur were only being paid at the rate of Rs. 2/50 to Rs. 3/- per day. The Chetna Sangh members, who themselves formed the bulk of those directly affected, managed to raise the issue with the landlords and local authorities, and are now being paid at the rate of Rs. 4/ per day according to the Minimum Wages Act.

(2) Old age pension

While identifying persons eligible for the grant of old age pensions, the instructors reported that the required application forms were not only not available to the rural poor, but also that the concerned officials were demanding Rs. 10/- per form. Chetna Sanghs functioning in the area not only got the forms locally printed after due permission from the District Magistrate, but distributed them at a nominal cost of a few paise and also helped old people fill these out. As a result a number of elderly people have been assisted in receiving their rightful dues in the form of monthly pensions.

(3) Disputes and compensation

In Saphuatola of Dhumnagar Dist., Sipahi Prasad,

an RDP supervisor, was hurt when the shop set up by the local Chetna Sangh was knocked down when the landlord's trailer-cum-tractor drove straight into it. His new bicycle was also smashed. The members of the regional Chetna Sangh happened to be present for a meeting, and promptly swung into action—not in taking any punitive action, but in noting down events, statements from eye-witnesses and insisting that no stand-in would suffice to settle the whole question. When the landlord was forced to come to the scene, he could find no loophole to use the force of musclemen and then file a dacoity charge against the members as is usually the case. A Panchayat meeting was set up at which the total damages were assessed, proceedings recorded, and the landlord not allowed to leave the spot without settling the agreed upon compensation of Rs. 1,365/- despite his efforts to plead lack of ready cash ! A small but significant victory in the long struggle towards a more equal sharing of power was won that day.

(4) Harijans and the law

August 1, 1979—a historic day in Kurmitola and the Harijan tola of Dhumnagar Panchayat, Nautan Block. Thanks to the process of consciousness-raising through the Chetna Sanghs of which they were members, 45 Chamar families reacted strongly to the action by the Kurmis—(one caste higher !)—who threatened and intimidated young Suresh Ram of their community when he sought solace for his personal grief by worshipping in the local mandir. Having learnt in their classes about the Constitution and laws declaring them equal, and also having studied and learnt about the word "SAMANTA" (equality) they decided to try and get these laws implemented. After local meetings, discussions with RDP members, the sub-divisional magistrate and the local Harijan Member of Parliament from Bettiah, they forwarded a petition requesting investigation and suitable action. (Incidentally, this petition had more signatures than thumb impressions !)

A joint *'pooja'* was finally performed on the first day of August 1979—this representing the culmination of months of struggle, at which Harijans and Kurmis partook of the *prasad*, and finally executed a bond signed by 10 members of each party assuring all people of the toli the right to worship at the temple irrespective of caste. Another milestone in their request for liberation from an oppressive and unjust system.

Today, these Harijans appear to have found a new dignity and a new confidence—they refuse to carry out menial tasks, and are no longer as vulnerable to the demands of the priest for money and goods as necessary vehicles to their salvation. Instead, they contribute 3 kgs of grain per family at harvest time and finance projects beneficial to the whole community. A joint quest for a new, dynamic and just meaning of religion has begun, in which the very basis of religious and social sanctions for discrimination, is being questioned.

(5) Literacy for women

The experience of the wives of landless labourers from Patkhauli village of Beria Block is significant. The menfolk, after attending some classes for a few months, had migrated to Punjab for employment during the harvest season of 1980. Their letters in simple, broken Hindi, were brought by the women to the instructor to read—and often created moment of embarrasment when certain personal matters became public. Gradually, this led to the strong desire among these women to be able to express their feelings and problems directly to their husbands—and so a number of the younger women enrolled themselves and taught themselves how to read and write.

The story and the instances can go on—a saga of human will, determination and collective effort to pull themselves out of the quagmire of poverty, ignorance, fear and injustice. But if this has been achieved through the medium of an educational programme, then that programme must have a a tremendous potential. The Chetna Sanghs have given rise in turn to Chetna Nidhis—(awareness funds), Chetna Bazaars—where nearby villages exchange their produce every fortnight, and Chetna Yug—a fortnightly news sheet for and by the new literates—containing mainly local and some national and even international news, which is of relevance to the learners. *'Shramdan'* programmes initiated by the Chetna Sanghs have done a lot of useful work in villages where no offical programmes had been undertaken; distribution of food and medicine to needy ones in their own village has been undertaken; and the idea of savings is being developed and encouraged.

Conclusion

It is clear, therefore, that the Adult Education centres and the Chetna Sanghs working under the K.R. Rural Development Project, Bettiah, have indeed served to foster a better self-image among the poor, especially the Harijans and the tribals of this area—a self-image that is seeking to tell them that they too are human beings with rights as well as duties like everyone else. Not only has this linking of literacy with consciousness-raising made them more aware of the need to educate themselves, but they are even more conscious of the need to educate their children and prevent them from falling into the same pitfalls as themselves.

The RDP has published detailed statistics about its work and results ; evaluations have been carried out for the Ministry by such prestigious institutions as the A.N. Sinha Institute in Patna—and of statistics we have no dearth in this country. What is significant is the fact that a literacy programme, and a government supported programme at that, has been able to create a movement which is unique—a people's movement in the real sense of that much misused phrase. But the RDP realises only too clearly that the way ahead is long, hard and painful.

While having attained a feeling of solidarity which has helped them face and overcome certain disturbing issues unitedly, the people are also aware of their own vulnerability to physical violence because of their social and economic backwardness. This often results in what appears to be resignation and an acceptance of the futility of struggle, but is actually a manifestation of their deep-rooted respect for life and desire for peace, which allows exploitation to go unchallenged.

There is also the equally strong realisation among the people that education which is not linked to employment has no value whatsoever for them. Whilst the Adult Education programme may have given some employment possibilities to a few 'educated' unemployed—there is simply no employment for the masses.

And above all, is the realisation by the people, that the nature of the education given in the context of the present socio-economic system is functional and relief-oriented, rather than being a path to the real sharing of the power of decision-making and an equitable distribution of national resources which they can control.

If this programme can raise these basic questions in the minds of some of the poor, the deprived, the economically and socially backward, then perhaps 'Adult literacy' as a mass movement has achieved something after all. □

Lalita Ramdas

EVERY CHILD'S BIRTHRIGHT

- NUTRITION
- EDUCATION
- A HAPPY CHILDHOOD

The Abner Experience

The Abner Memorial School's Non-Formal Adult Literacy Project

Alienation of the elite

Struck by the increasing alienation of the middle and upper-class school student from his/her peers in the community, we felt a need to expose such students to the realities of poverty situations faced by people, and more particularly, by their peers, through a programme which could be integrated into the school syllabus. This marked the genesis of the programme. As the work began, our surveys revealed more and more pockets of illiteracy—both among children and adults in the city; so the programme was gradually enlarged and extended to a few adult groups, making use of volunteer teachers in addition to the student teachers. Quite often it was the functioning of a children's centre which encouraged their mothers, sisters, aunts and occasionally the menfolk too, to come along—often out of sheer curiosity, and sometimes with a specific request to join the learners. It was through these beginnings that the programme grew into a full-fledged project which had as its twin objectives :

1) student exposure and creation of social awareness in them, as well as participation in a national programme of non-formal education.
2) an effort to make a dent, however small, on the vast problem of illiteracy and ignorance in which so many were trapped.

Teaching/learning

Planned essentially as a teaching-cum-learning programme for senior school students, the main emphasis was necessarily on locating and reaching groups of children in the community, ranging from 5 to 15 years in age. And the majority of these were located in the walled city—the area from where most of the school students came too. In addition, we ran six centres to which women and girls came—two out of these were exclusively for tailoring, one where craft and literacy were sought to be combined, and three for just literacy. For about six months, again in response to working with children at Palika Dham near Gole Market, we ran an adult men's centre in the evenings.

The very first adult women's centre was begun in Nov. '77 at Matia Mahal in the heart of the Jama Masjid area, in the home of one of our students—Fozia. Since then, this has been one of the few centres which has functioned regularly till today and certainly represents a success story in the short history of our work. With a large proportion of students from the conservative Muslim families of the city, it was a natural area in which to concentrate our efforts.

Women in purdah

One of our major target groups was the burkha-clad community of girls and women who had to observe purdah, and were rarely if ever allowed out of their homes, let alone being allowed to study. But for three years now, thanks to the dedicated women teachers from the community, some of these young women have passed through the classes, become literate, had an opportunity to discuss problems, visit some areas of interest in the city, and, for the first time perhaps, been exposed to another world. Some of these women were involved for a while in cutting and tailoring classes too, but due to difficulties of space and staffing, these were discontinued. We are now investigating the possibilities of running a training-cum-production centre to encourage the development of traditional local skills like embroidery with silk and zari, etc. as many of them have expressed the need to be able to use their talents in order to augment their income. Student social workers placed with us, together with our own staff, have also held regular discussions with these girls and women, on a variety of problems—from religion, family planning, and marriage, to dowry and women's status.

The girls and women also participated in a cultural programme at Bal Bhavan where items from some twenty centres were presented. For such a conservative group to be able to step out of their 'mohalla' and present a show in public was itself a great step forward.

The women speak

Some time ago we conducted an evaluation and interviews were recorded on reactions to experiences at the centres:

Q: Why do you come to the centre ?

Fatima : *We come here because we want to study, so we can learn something. Even if one sits at home one can at least read books. When one is illiterate, one is a liability to others. At the bus-stop you have to ask "Where does this bus go ?" because you can't read.*

Nadira : *Now we can write letters to our brothers ourselves, and we do not have to get their letters read out elsewhere.*

(Her brothers are all out of Delhi and a few out of the country).

Q: What was the reaction at home to your coming here ?

Salma : *At first everyone was opposed to the idea : "She has reached marriageable age. There is no point in her studying." Then I explained how my elder married sister had to face so much ridicule from her in-laws for being illiterate, so they agreed. In eight months I've learnt enough to write letters to all my relatives...*

Q: Other than coming to the centre do you go out at all ?

Nadira : *No. I only come to the centre. We rarely go out of the 'mohalla', and only with our parents. You see, we are in purdah. I have the entire burden of the housework on me, so it is very difficult for me even to come here !*

Q: Why didn't your parents send you to school ?

Noorbanu : *They felt it wrong for girls to be educated. They feel we will become bad, evil.*

Q: What do you feel ?

Noorbanu : *Women should also learn something. They feel women should be locked away at home—but education is essential. Our five brothers are educated, but none of us girls is. It was only to be able to read my relatives' letters that my parents let me to come to the class at all.*

But despite their struggles and problems with orthodoxy at home, these women heve continued to come—the proximity of the centre also helps --and they have won their little struggles on the long, hard road to self-assertion and independence for which they recognise education as an important tool.

An experiment

At Anguri Bagh, (a small mohalla contiguous with the northern boundary wall of Red Fort), we ran a centre for about two and a half years for a small group of women—mainly wives of Class IV employees, many of whom themselves worked as part-time domestic help. Taught by a Malayali parent volunteer who virtually taught herself Hindi in order to be able to do this work, these women learnt a certain amount in terms of actual literacy skills. But this centre deserves mention more because of the participation by these women in social action on some issues directly affecting their lives.

As part of a definite programme, the women at this centre were exposed to a series of extra inputs by way of talks and demonstrations on family planning, a play, an exhibition, discussions on dowry, and a number of informal chats on problems they faced in their community. These ranged from standing in endless queues for water, the fights around the one tap, problems of chronic illness and the demands by mothers-in-law to go on producing babies until sons are

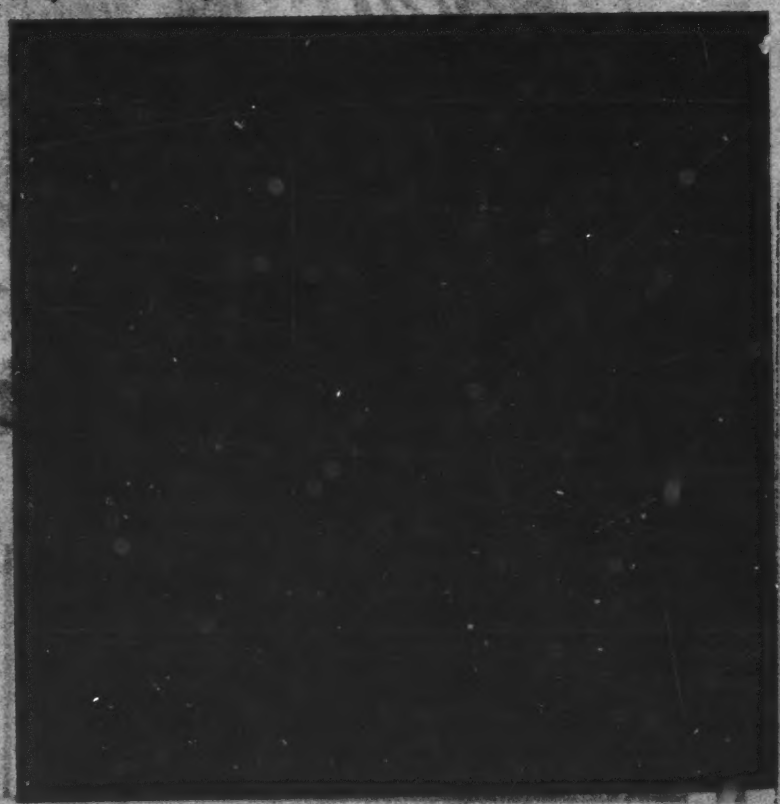
born. The women gradually became more and more articulate and vocal in voicing opinions about much that plagued them in their daily lives. Amongst these, the lack of permanent ration cards was one of the major problem areas and it was on this issue that about 20 women from the centre, with babes in arms and accompanied by a few women workers from the project, went on a 'long march'. More specifically, they walked the 5 kms to the office of the Rationing Authority, went through the whole tiresome process of getting forms, having them deciphered and filled and submitted—a process often bewildering enough for most of the so-called 'educated' among the group. For those who had learned how to read and write there was the added feeling of power which comes from being able to complete the filling of forms and signing personally on the spot. The women finally got the ration cards, and in their own words: "It made us realise that we could help ourselves by working co-operatively and together. We have also understood the power of being able to read and write."

These same women, having gained self-confidence, were even motivated enough to participate in a march and a rally on the Madura rape case on the occasion of Women's Day—March 1980. This again had been preceded by a series of discussions on the question of rape and the vulnerability of women, and how they could show solidarity with their sisters.

Economic incentive

However, this level of intensive activity and input was hard to sustain and the real learning process has in fact been for us adults in the project. The growing requirements of coping with an increasingly tight economic situation makes the need to earn or supplement earnings the prime factor. With the arrival of a gentleman who offered them the possibility of earning between Rs. 1/- and Rs. 5/- per day sitting in their homes and making flower garlands, the choice was clearly in favour of a programme which offered an economic incentive rather than a mere literacy programme whose benefits were neither clear-cut nor immediate! We have learnt our lessons too—that any programme of literacy which is not linked with productivity and income-generation has limited relevance to those from the marginalised groups. We also realise that we need a more organised, better trained and motivated staff who will deliver not just skills in literacy and numeracy, but double as social animators who can involve the adults of a community or centre in finding collective solutions to problems and issues arising out of their own life-situations. For the successful implementation of any programme of learning with adults in deprived sections it is vital that there be an integration of the components of literacy, functionality and awareness, and it is towards such objectives that our future planning should lead. □

Lalita Ramdas



Chipko Andolan : A New Approach to an Old Problem

Chipko Andolan, a movement born in 1973 with the slogan "We shall never let the trees be cut, we shall let ourselves be cut first" (Ped nahin ham katenge, ped se pahele ham katenge) has today grown roots in the hilly Himalayan districts of Northern India. The movement had its origin in the struggle of a small institution employing a few local people in a forest-based industry against the Forest Department's refusal to allow it free access to raw materials. But soon it grew beyond that into a struggle of the forest people for their forest rights. The leaders of the movement had understood that policies which failed to protect the interests of forest dwellers could never protect the real interests of the forests either. The people and the forests of Uttarakhand would both be the losers.

Struggle for survival

Long years before the movement to protect the forests by hugging the trees was even dreamt of, the people of this region had been sadly aware of the tough struggle for survival that is the daily life of the common man in these parts. Young children, not yet into their teens, go down into the plains in hundreds every year to earn a meagre living in homes and restaurants, washing dishes and doing menial chores to send home a few rupees every month. The illiterate or semi-literate join the army as jawans or work as 'chaprasis' in government offices. The manpower that could be used for the development of this region is lost to it. On the other hand, there is a vast potential wealth in the forests of the area, but misuse and lack of forethought have led to a situation which speaks of a grimfuture both for the forests and the hill people. In Chamoli, one such afflicted district in the Garhwal area of U.P. some young people of the village got together in the sixties and began to think of ways of ending the exploitation of the people. Being on the Tibet border, the Government of India had, following the hostilities with China, begun some development efforts. Roads and offices were being rapidly built. But the workers, craftsmen and contractors for these constructions all came from the plains. The local people were only employed as stone-breakers. So the young men began by forming a cooperative of local labourers and succeeded in obtaining the contract for a small road. The job was done better and cheaper than by the outside contractors, and in addition, the labourers received, as members, higher payment. Encouraged by this success of unskilled labourers, the group sent a few members down to the plains for training in skills, and launched a small forest-based enterprise. Agriculture alone, which is seasonal, is not enough to sustain the population, and besides, the control of forests is concentrated in the hands of outsiders, who have no qualms about exploiting either the forests or the people. So it is essential for the local people to develop forest-based industries which can provide additional employment and income for them. With this intention, a small workshop making furniture and agricultural tools was set up.

How it began

In 1972-73, an institution called the Dasohli Gram Swarajya Mandal, requested the Forest Department to release some ash wood, as this wood is suitable for making light but sturdy implements. The Department refused on the grounds that it was not the policy to make such expensive timber available to small workshops. So the timber that could have been used by a local workshop to employ local people was allotted to a sports goods manufacturing concern in the plains—the Simon Company. Wounded to the core, the institution and the village people determined not to let the trees be cut. But no one knew how to achieve it. Meetings were held daily and various alternatives suggested. Some people wanted to burn the trees, some wanted

to cut them down in secret, others suggested lying down in front of the company trucks as a form of *satyagraha*. But no one could decide what to do. Chance brought the answer.

The little town of Gopeshwar, the headquarters of Chamoli District, is situated at 5,500 ft. deep in the Himalayas. In those days, there was no hotel or rest-house there for travellers. In March 1973, when some representatives of the Simon Company arrived in Gopeshwar late one evening, they were told that the only place they could possibly be lodged was in the guest house of the Dosohli Gram Swarajya Mandal. Fatigued by the ten-hour bus journey up the rough mountain roads, the men arrived at the guest house. The workers of the institution, though they knew full well who the visitors were, gave them a warm and courteous welcome.

Quickly a young worker rushed to the house of Chandi Prasad Bhatt, the head of the organisation, to inform him of what had happened. Calm, though moved by a powerful emotion, and shining with inner strength, he said, "Go and tell them they can never cut the trees of this village. We will hug the trees (chipko). Let the axe fall on our backs first before it touches the trunks of the trees."

And so was born a new weapon and a new word in the vocabulary of satyagraha—*chipko*, or hug the trees, a weapon that could be used by everyone, man, woman or child.

When the workers of the Simon Company climbed up the hill to Mandal, near Gopeshwar, to cut the trees, they were astonished to find a crowd of people, dressed in their best, singing and dancing, ready to protect their beloved trees by hugging them. Taken aback, the men returned to Gopeshwar without even attempting to cut the trees, and complained to the authorities. Unwilling to antagonise the local people any further, the Forest Department discreetly asked the Simon Company to withdraw from Gopeshwar and allotted them a new area, the forest of Phata in the Kedar Valley, for the purpose. But lo and behold, when the men reached the valley, they found that the Chipko Andolan had travelled ahead of them. Twice felling was attempted, and twice had to be given up. For nine long months, the three groups—Simon Company, the Forest Department and the village people—played a grim game of hide and seek. In December 1973, the lease of the company expired and the forest was saved.

After the disaster

In 1970, three years before the movement began, there had been a terrible flash flood in the river Alaknanda, the chief tributary of the mighty Ganges. For the previous ten years, timber felling and road building had been going on indiscriminately in the catchment area of the Alaknanda. The denuded mountain slopes could not contain the fury of the monsoon of 1973; and gigantic landslides followed. The river choked. In Belakuchi, the main sufferer, the water level rose by 60 feet. Villages, fields and animals were washed away. 183 persons lost their lives. 300 km away the Upper Ganges canal in northern U.P. was filled with silt, and water from the canal could not be released for irrigation for six months. Nearly a crore of rupees had to be spent to desilt the canal. During this critical period, the workers of the DGSM travelled far and wide by foot in the affected villages and were active in relief work. But they did more. They also prepared a report pointing out that indiscriminate felling during the previous ten years was the major cause of flash floods and disaster. But few were prepared to listen to the voice of a small village organisation.

Soon after the successful Chipko Andolan in 1973, the workers of the movement learnt that a large forest in Reni village, situated in the sensitive Alaknanda upper catchment area, was to be auctioned and 2,500 trees felled for timber. At the time of the 1970 disaster, the workers had toured the area and were fully aware of the danger that would follow if this forest were destroyed. They decided to save the Reni forest by launching a chipko movement in that area.

For three months, they walked through the villages surrounding Reni, gathering people and holding meetings, explaining the relationship between forest felling and the occurrence of landslides and flash floods. They reminded the people of the disaster of 1970 and the tremendous losses they had suffered. It did not take the village people long to understand the issues; but on everyone's lips rose the question, "What can we do to save the forest?" And the answer was, "Hug the trees."

Warned that the ideas of the Chipko Andolan had spread to Reni, the government tried to defuse the issue by seeing to it

that on the day appointed for the felling as few people as possible should be present in Reni. The leading workers of the movement were kept away from the site by various means. The able-bodied men and leaders were sent for, ordered to the district headquarters on a certain day to collect some long outstanding dues from the local government offices, and the contractor and his men were sent to fell the trees at the same time. But the women of Reni saw the contractor's men approaching and decided to act. Twenty-seven women, including young girls and little children, collected and refused to allow the men to fell the trees. 'This forest is our mother,' they said, 'our protector; if you cut the trees, our lives, our homes, our property will all be destroyed by floods and landslides.' They relieved the men of their tools and brought them down to the village. Some of the women stayed back to destroy the paths leading to the forest so that the labourers could not go there in secret later on. But the contract had been legally allotted following the auction and the contractor had full rights to the forest. He and his men stayed in Reni for a month, while the people of Neeti Valley kept watch over their mother, the forest. Finally, the U.P. Government set up an enquiry commission to look into the whole matter. The committee, headed by a distinguished scientist, Dr. Virendra Kumar, after a close study of the problem, came to the conclusion that the demands of the village people were justified and that felling of trees in the area would have serious negative consequences for the whole area. The committee went a step further and recommended that felling in an area of 1200 sq. km be banned for a period of ten years. The U.P. Government accepted the recommendations in full. Not only Reni but the entire area has been reprieved for the next ten years.

The movement grows

The struggle for Reni and the victory at Reni helped the Chipko Andolan to establish itself as a force in other districts of Uttarakhand. In August 1974, Sarvodaya workers of Uttarakhand passed a resolution demanding a 5-year ban on felling in the catchment areas of the major Himalayan rivers. The Chipko workers now turned their attention to the making of resin and turpentine by tapping resin from pine trees and the problems that it caused. In each area, the workers now took up different issues and different problems, but the call was the same—save forest wealth and protect the forests. In the Heval Valley of district Tehri, the women protested against the destruction of pine trees by removing the iron tapping nails and bandaging the trees with cold earth. Village women like Hemavati Devi and young workers like Dhoom Singh Negi, Kunwar Prasoor and Pratap Shikhir played a leading role in the campaign, under the leadership of Sundarlal Bahuguna. In Advani village the women symbolised their protection of the forest by tying 'rakhis' to the trees, and welcomed the officials of the Forest Department to their village with lighted lanterns in broad daylight. In Almora district, the forests of Chanchalidhar were protected by the women, students and young workers under the leadership of Shamsher Singh Bisht. The women of Bhyundar similarly saved the forests near the world-famous Valley of Flowers. The wood from this forest is traditionally used to cook 'prasad' at the temple of Badrinath. But the women of the village ranked the protection of the Himalyan environment, which sustains their lives, as greater in importance than lighting the fires of their own temple in Badrinath.

Many more examples could be given. In Joshimath, in August 1979 the army had decided to clear some forest in order to start an experimental farm. But the women of the village took up the weapon of Chipko for their struggle and prevented the felling. Similarly, in 1980, several villages in Chamoli participated in the same manner and saved their forests by their silent protests.

Reforesting the hills

Saving the forest is only one aspect of the movement; the other is reforestation. The movement is working to heal the gaping wounds in the Himalayas by planting new trees wherever there is vacant space and thus trying to restore the balance of the environment, and to provide fuel, fodder and forest-based industry for the coming generations. What could be a better response to the untold damage caused by earlier generations with their thoughtless felling ? In this

gigantic reconstruction movement, the common people of the villages, students and young children, are all playing a part. Winter or summer, fog or rain, the workers go from village to village, school to school, carrying the message through simple slogans such as "Landslides stop when trees grow." *(Bhookhalan kab rukega, naya ped jab lagega.)* As soon as school is over, the children rush out to join the workers in tree plantation.

Attitudes are important

Today the DGSM has developed a plan for the protection of the 27 villages in the Alaknanda valley. Young and old, men and women, are participating, saving the old, planting the new. The Chipko Andolan has won the sympathies and support of the State government, Central government, and of friends both in India and abroad because of attitudes underlying its work—thought for the future, practicality, consideration and love towards others even in the midst of struggle. Struggle, cooperation, reconstruction—with these three as its goals, the movement has won a growing following among the village people while at the same time drawing the attention of the nation and the government to the problems of the hilly areas. This uniquely non-violent movement has already played a significant role in bringing new greenery to the parched earth of the Himalayas and new hope to its struggling people. In its quiet way, it will go on doing so, arousing the hill people and working for both people and forests. □

Anupam Mishra

WE USE WASTE

Don't throw it away,
It gives children a busy and creative day.

USEFUL MATERIALS TO COLLECT

Containers	Plastic buckets/tubes, earthen vessels.
Tins	Bournvita, ghee, oil, Nescafe, powder and other tins.
Boxes/cartons	Made of stiff cardboard.
Metal or Plastic	Cups, bowls, saucers, glasses, spoons, mugs.
Household and Kitchen	Sieves, corks, funnels, plastic or rubber tubing.
Tyres	Car or truck tyres, scooter or motor-cycle tyres.
Ice-cream	Spoons, empty plastic cups.
Empty boxes	Match boxes, cigarette boxes.
Wood	Pieces, planks, small stools, toys, blocks.
Paper	Used cyclostyling paper and office paper, blank on one side.
Pictures	Old magazines, calendars, post cards.
Bags	Brown paper bags, polythene bags.
Books	Used exercise books, registers etc. with cardboard covers, and transparent coloured paper.
Clothes	Old saris, scarves, shawls, shirts, hats and any other.
Socks	Men's socks, stockings or knee socks.
Wool	Assorted pieces of wool of all colours and lengths.
Rag-bag	Pieces of coloured cloth left over from sewing, pieces of tape, string and wool, buttons.
Crayons	Used crayons, paints or brushes.
Newspapers	
Cloth	Old curtains, bedsheets, saris, towels etc.
Used dolls and toys	Especially wheeled toys.
Bottles	Horlicks, jam, Bru, with fitting lids.

Please send things which are useable, in reasonably good condition and which will not cause harm to children.

Mobile Creches
5-B, Telegraph Lane
NEW DELHI - 110001
Tel. : 351009

Working Hours
8.30 a.m. — 1.00 p.m.
2.00 p.m. — 4.30 p.m.

Lok Doot—Theatre for Education

The story of *Lok Doot* is the story of so many other things in Mobile Creches—the story of the slow organic growth of a programme from a simple response to a human situation. Growth has taken place through the method of struggle, experiment, and constant referral back to the need from which it arose. Today *Lok Doot* (People's Messenger) can be called the communication arm of Mobile Creches. But how did it begin ? Perhaps one evening at a discussion, after a visit to construction sites at night, where after dark, one might as well be in a remote rural area as in the heart of Delhi—huts clustered together in the dark, a few dim oil lamps and an occasional kerosene lantern, 'chulhas' smoking in the open, men and women at rest after cooking and eating their simple evening meal, slipping off to sleep, fatigued after a long day's work. No radio, no TV, no film, no blaring loudspeakers or powerful lights—these are islands in the city.

Entertainment rare

Migrant workers, living in their cloistered and comfortless enclaves, rarely venture out to sample the typical city entertainments of cinema, bazaar or mass sport; at the same time, they are cut off from the traditional rural entertainments of the 'mela', the seasonal itinerant players and entertainers to which they are accustomed in their village homes. So for the most part, they live with little recreation or entertainment, though sometimes on special days, evenings of songs and dance are spontaneously held or 'bhajan' sessions organised for religious occasions. So one evening came the thought—"Why don't we at Mobile Creches do something about it ? Why don't we provide

some simple entertainment ? We have some talent among the staff—let's draw upon it and see what we can do." And so came into being a small team of young men and women who formed the first brave little drama troupe, out to provide simple fun and joy right on the construction sites at night.

The first show was a short skit on the theme of the dangers of illiteracy (for from the beginning the aim was to educate while entertaining), a skit quickly improvised in a few informal drama workshop sessions, based on a true incident related by one of the workers at a literacy class. The shows were seen as a part of adult education, a means of motivating people to join the literacy classes, and the literacy staff were intimately involved. More than half of the first members of *Lok Doot* were day-care workers with children and doubled as literacy teachers at night. So they already had some knowledge of the community for which they were preparing the entertainment.

At the very first performance, a tremendous discovery was made. The show was ostensibly supposed to be about what happens to an innocent and guileless illiterate who falls victim to the wiles of a wicked confidence trickster, but is later rescued by the efforts of his kind-hearted literacy teacher (so naive was the plot !). But to everyone's surprise, what really went straight to the hearts of the audience was the fluent dialogue and inspired wise-cracking in the Rajasthani dialect by those playing the role of Rajasthani migrant workers, for none of the players were native speakers of the dialect and had only picked it up through their contacts with the community. This ability to empathise, to enter into their lives whole-heartedly, to speak the language, sing their songs and dance their dances captured the audience at once, poor though the quality of performance was and simple-minded the plot. There were repeated calls for more, and thus encouraged, *Lok Doot* began seriously to think about extending its repertoire to include more than one play. And the first lesson had been learnt : whatever the content of the message, let the medium be the one closest to the audience, based, if possible, on their own forms of expression.

Folk forms

So began a journey at two levels —on the one hand, experiments in communicating ideas and messages through the medium of drama, the stress on content, its meaning and relevance, by those who were not specialists in communication; on the other hand, an exploration of folk forms in theatre, again, by those who had little exposure to any theatre except that of 'filmi' urban culture The study of the songs and dances of the migrant workers, gradually broadening out to include other areas and dialects besides those of Rajasthan, and their incorporation or sometimes adaptation into the plays, has been an essential part of the method ever since. So, too, has been the use of colloquial speech in the various dialects.

Later came more sophisticated attempts to study and use the various forms of folk theatre, examples of which were accessible to the group. The medium has developed through interaction with resource people—actors, directors, folksingers and balladeers, dancers, students, writers and others willing to give some time to this brave attempt, by amateurs committed to a cause. But side by side, the content was built up through the perceptions and growing understanding of the members of the group supported by those of the rest of the staff. How the two strands were woven together will be illustrated in the following pages, but first it would be worthwhile to describe the shows and the people who perform them.

Imagine, then, a moonless night in the burning summer of Delhi, a small open space in the middle of a cluster of tumble-down huts—that is the stage. For lighting, three or four kerosene lanterns strung up on a rope between poles, or if lucky, a couple of electric bulbs with power drawn from the nearest street lamp. An expectant and decorous audience crouching on all four sides of the 'stage', large numbers of children in the front, men leaning against huts or on 'charpoys', women gathered on one side.

In such a setting, a van draws up, a group of 8 to 10 young men and women jump out carrying a small trunk of clothes and a few musical instruments. The musicians sit down on the improvised stage and start with a few songs while the players hastily change and make up in a dark corner and soon the performance begins.

There can be no props, everything is imaginary; no set and no changes of scene, which have to be created by the actors' gestures; little by way of costumes and make-up; speech has to be loud and clear to be heard in the open, and gestures broad and simple; what the acting lacks in subtlety it must make up for by volume and force. The performers have to learn to bellow and roar, though the musicians who keep up the chorus have the advantage of a battery-operated microphone and loudspeaker. But if the voices cannot carry far and finer points of expression and dialogue are lost, the audience can be directly engaged in conversation and in response, and the players can gear their playing to the reactions of the spectators. Sensing a loss of attention, one bursts into song and changes the tenor of the play; another enlivens the proceedings with improvised jokes about people on the site. And who are the performers ?

Teacher-actors

Over the years, Mobile Creches has come to respect the staff members who, in its special terminology, are sometimes referred to as the 'day-night' workers—that is, those who work with children the whole day in centres from 8:00 a.m to 4:30 p.m. and also, five nights a week, teach literacy in men's or women's classes from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. A demanding and fatiguing day—yet it is they, because of their close observation of the lives of adults and children at every point of the day, their interaction in every situation, their constant presence on the work-site, their involvement in the

joys and sorrows of the community, who become, not only the friends and mentors of the community but also the eyes and ears of Mobile Creches. They see the labour camp by day and by night; they know of most of what goes on; soaked in the language, the mores of the community, they are the invaluable antennae which subtly provide the feedback on which the programme rests. But this sensitivity has to be nurtured and stimulated by constant reminder, probing, questioning and discussion; hence the repeated worshops, evaluations, discussions and meetings.
It has also to be recognized and rewarded; hence the special allowances and incentives to those involved in a double capacity. The weaknesses of this group, the limitations and lacks, are reflected in the weakness of performance and achievement; but from its strengths grew the richness of content drawn from the earthy everyday observed reality.
Out of it grew, too, an obsesssion with 'relevance' of both content and mode; this was one of the reasons why early attempts to bring other theatrical performing groups onto work-sites were given up, though financial and administrative reasons also played a part. There are many street and other theatre groups in Delhi; but few which have played on the construction site, either on their own or at Mobile Creches' initiative.
Political theatre could not be introduced without threatening the fragile base on which the programme itself was built—the lack of hostility, if not the positive support of the employers. Other urban theatre seemed far too 'irrelevant' in the context of the work-site and this only strengthened the need to build a relevant one. Also, the framework of tight schedules, rigid emphasis on punctuality, severe punishments for breaches of discipline by staff, and other aspects of Mobile Creches' structure and method, often made it difficult for outsiders to participate. So once more thrown back on our own resources, came a determination to work within limitations. And limitations there were many. If the most sacred duty of a field worker is to remain in the field and to be the sensitive antenna which feeds the programme, then how can field workers be called in frequently for rehearsals and working sessions in drama ? And if they do not rehearse regularly, how can performances achieve any kind of quality, leave alone excellence ? With once a week meetings, it often takes three to four months just to develop a new show. Yet the doggedness has worked—and in spite of all the problems, four or five new shows have been produced every year for the last five years.

Familar stories

What are these shows ? To begin with, they were simple plays based on stories from the Panchatantra or Hitopadesa, aimed at both children and adults, for children form at least half the audience, if not more, in most of the performances; some religious and mythological themes, out of a belief that these would be more acceptable to an essentially conservative and traditional people; humorous skits in dialect depicting the consequences of illiteracy, a not-so-subtle propaganda for the literacy class; later, the first glimmerings of ideology in attempting to deal with themes like *Shabari* and *Buddha*, still within the framework of religion and mythology but now trying to confront issues like untouchability and equality, yet not succeeding because of a naively didactic approach and the absence of any understanding of the power and resource of the theatre medium.
The didactic approach seemed to need a well-meaning 'educated' person in the play ,one who would deliver the 'message' at the end—and here entered the element of smugness, the "I'm telling you" attitude, the condescension. Was there a way out ? Could the plot itself be so constructed that the solution emerged from the action ? Could the protagonist discover the answer instead of having it told to him/her ? Could the message be slipped in indirectly without hammering home a moral ? A stray comment heard in the audience one night at a show—"Yes, the drama is fun, but you're laughing at us, aren't you ?" opened eyes to another viewpoint. Could our delight in being able to act and speak in dialect seem like 'laughing at' people, and how could 'laughing at' be turned into 'laughing with ?' Heated discussions led to the construction of 'well-made' plots which unfolded with inexorable logic and without the intervention of special characters.
For instance, in *Andh Viswas* (*Superstition*) the young son is the protagonist who tries in vain to convince his mother that her faith in the exorcist healer is mere superstition which is

exploited by greed. Finally he has recourse to a trick, acting as the ghost of his dead grandfather and telling his mother what medical advice to follow, and at the climax, revealing the truth to his mother. It was essential to take the audience into confidence so that they could identify with the protagonist, so it was decided that the boy would dress up as a ghost, in full view of the audience. But on the first night the play was staged, the actors, thinking perhaps that it was clumsy or unaesthetic to change costume on stage, retired to back-stage (meaning out of the circle of light and into a hut) to change, thereby not giving the audience a chance to understand what he was doing, and in fact misleading them into believing in the reality of the ghost themselves !
A furious argument on this took place in the evaluation session after the show, and the actors reluctantly, agreed to play it the other way. At the next show, the quality of the laughter changed—for lo and behold 'laughing at' ignorance and superstiton had been basically transformed into 'laughing with'. A simple theatrical device for identification had brought about a profound change in values.

Stories that teach

Now other plays followed the same indirect approach. In *Andha Beta (The Miser's Blind Son)*, a didactic play on the importance of green vegetables, the main character is a stereotyped miserly Seth whose son suffers from night blindness as a result of childhood malnutrition. Deliberately, the protagonist is 'distanced' from the audience —they can hardly be expected to identify with a rich Seth. But this very distancing allows the idea to become clear that it is not poverty or wealth which is the issue nor even knowledge and ignorance, but an attitude of mind and its consequences. Yet another theatrical device helped to attack the idea and not the person, to separate the singer from the song. Again, in *Rog Rani, (The Queen of Disease)* the protagonist, a young boy from the migrant workers' community, decides to fight disease by exploring the causes of disease.
Here too a conflict developed while the play was being worked out through the processes of collective improvisation. How could an ignorant young 'uneducated' boy find out such things ? Was the idea not one to be presented by a scientist or a doctor who should explain the causes of disease? No, that would once more introduce precisely the elitism of the educated that we wished to avoid. Let the boy act on his own, let him be motivated, let him struggle. But what would motivate him to fight against disease ? His sorrows, his sufferings, the death of his loved ones ? Perhaps. What else ? Only if he could *see* for himself would he have the knowledge and the will to act. But how ridiculous, came the response, how can anyone *see* the cause of disease ? Through the microscope, of course, which reveals the wonders of the micro-world, and which would be introduced by a scientist. And so *Rog Rani* was portrayed as a seductive but deadly goddess, ruling over her kingdom of invisible bacteria and viruses and germs; which the boy enters secretly through the 'magic' of the microscope to defeat her with the weapons of knowledge and cooperative action. This was the first timid attempt to use fantasy—a difficult one for those accustomed to thinking of theatre as realistic 'imitation' of life. "What do microbes look like ? What's their shape ? How do they move ? How can we act like germs ?" were the questions. "No one knows, so you can present them any way you like" was the answer, and so a fantasy product humbly offered, was a rather uncertain dance of the microbes side by side with some hilarious realistic sequences.
Each of these early explorations represented a big step forward in understanding the medium of drama itself—learning how to use theatrical devices like distancing and identification and leaning on fantasy and symbolism.

The creative process

To understand why these were such notable achievements, it is necessary to know how the shows are created. There is no director, no writer, no script, no text. The group starts with an idea, a theme, or a message, suggested by a co-worker, or drawn from their own experience. They begin with a series of loose exercises, in mime, movement, speech and improvisation, at first on random topics, as warm-ups, later slowly getting closer to the chosen theme. Then smaller groups get to work on the

theme itself, work out a story line using the exercise material and present short improvisations. Then the debate starts. The most worthwhile story is selected, or the best is drawn from various group ideas and a rough story line is worked out. This stage may take several days. After that, group improvisation begins again. The story is developed and section by section, scenes improvised. The main ideas are written down for reference, for often in the heat of creation, the members stray away from the theme, or lay too much stress on something else, or fail to project the key idea. Each sequence is analysed, debated, re-worked several times. Gradually the play begins to take shape. Some portions are in mime, some in speech, some in verse or music.

Songs are composed at this stage, drawing on literary skills to compose the words. Again there is debate. Which tune would be most suitable to convey the mood, the theme, the environment ? The aesthetics of prose and verse and their appropriateness at each point are discussed. Now the play is almost ready. There is still no script (there never is), but an outline of the action sequences is written down, and the composed verse and music recorded. The play-out of the entire play takes place a few times, followed by polishing for presentation—details of mime, action, voice, manner and speech, gesture and choreography are taken up now. Before the first presentation, the show is usually performed to a small group from within Mobile Creches. Did the idea get across? Often the reactions are painful—the process starts again, the play is taken apart and put together on the basis of these comments. Now the play is ready for first performance but it is never, in fact, 'finished'. After each performance, there is a brief evaluation, based on audience reactions and problems encountered. The play is constantly modified, improved. Dialogue, of course, is improvised afresh each time, enabling the actors to draw in the audience, make topical references and adapt to each new situation as it arises. In this active and living theatre, it is only humanly natural that often mistakes occur. Lines are not forgotten, perhaps because there are none, but the balance alters subtly, and messages, or values, become disorted by a slight change of emphasis, a difference in words spoken, in the manner of delivery. This is the risk inherent in the improvised performance and why evaluation also has to be an ongoing process and success is in constant danger of slipping back into failure.

Drama to discussion

With growing confidence, came another breakthrough—the attempt to use drama as the starting point for discussion about important issues, and this led in turn to new experiments in media. The attempt began with *Ekalavya*, a story poignantly relevant to the struggles of the under-privileged today to cut through the barriers of caste and class, yet, in its traditional form, appearing to uphold the most conservative and reprehensible values. The problem was to disentangle the right values and present them in an acceptable form. The first attempt to portray a realistic modern *Ekalavya* was a miserable failure;—after two years of reflection and experimentation, what emerged was a play in the form of two parallel stories—a 'play within a play.' The original story was retold in mime, verse and music, at a dignified pace, true to the time-honoured tale; alongside, came the story of the young Rajasthani couple on a construction site and their struggle for education. Their running commentary on the action brought the main issues to the forefront.

Too many issues

But did they ? Performances of the play were followed by discussion held the next day on work-sites, in which the staff tried to discuss the issues presented. (As usual, a workshop had been held already at which a performance was followed by a model discussion, led by some of the players and trainers.) In spite of all this preparation, the exercise ran into serious difficulties - there were too many issues, the issues were too complex to be articulated easily, people often missed the point and latched on to in significant details and so on. Most people who had enjoyed the play appeared reluctant to be engaged in discussion about it. Staff often found it difficult to lead the discussion meaning-fully—they ended up retelling the story or drawing the moral. Yet the play itself was a powerful one which made its own impact through the language of symbol

—attempts to verbalise it seemed only to detract from its strength. Perhaps it was better to let the symbolic language do its work at levels other than the consciously verbalised—the resonance was that of a message of hope. So *Ekalavya* has been played often but rarely 'discussed' of late.

Search for form

Meanwhile, this generated a search for forms that *could* be usefully discussed. It seemed that drama was not the right medium—it was too long, too vast, too rich, too full of fun and distraction, too difficult to tackle. What was needed were media sharper, shorter, more pointed, conveying a *single* message briefly, yet with colour and spirit enough to arouse and sustain interest. The same group began, with the help of resource people, to explore new media, drawing inspiration once again from traditional models. *Rog Rani* lent itself excellently to the 'phad' or scroll—which turned out, in the hands of a folk painter from Madhubani, to be a series of four or five colourful drawings which, with song and narration, could be a mini-performance, requiring only two or three players, and leading straight away into a discussion on the prevention of disease. This was how *Mini Lok Doot* was born—the audio-visual presentation by a small team, flexible, free to move rapidly wherever needed, with little to carry by way of kit, ready with brief entertainment to initiate discussion. Others in this series were developed—a puppet play, a flash-card presentation, and most recently, a 'kavad' (magic story box), an adaptation of a traditional story-telling device from Madhya Pradesh. In this process technical competence grew, and so did the ability to work with colleagues, for others, more skilled in the plastic arts and crafts had to be drawn into the process to prepare these new media. From being simply a drama group, the group began to evolve into a genuine communications group, with different members bringing different skills and abilities to each new creation. Training also was intensified by

interaction with resource people, study of folk theatre forms, visits to other groups working with the community, and to examples of good, meaningful theatre in other contexts.

Puppet play

Two more examples may serve to illustrate the nature of the creative process and the constant balance between the search for new forms and the search for meaningful content—the one drawing on technical expertise and the other returning to the source—the spectators. The first one concerns the age-old question of keeping the environment around the labour camps clean as a safeguard to health. How could this dreary old topic, which had been endlessly discussed in meetings be made interesting ? How could we avoid the same tired old exhortations ending in little but noise ? How could we use theatre to h[illegible] ? It was decided to draw upon all the knowledge acquired about theatrical devices to build a puppet play—the first step was the lesson of 'distancing' by using puppets. Improvisations were tried out—but all were bleak and dull, telling the people what to do, with no fun or charm. Suddenly, one of the group had a mischievous idea—why not bring in an incognito visit by one of the gods—after all, it was about Diwali time when people traditionally clean and purify their homes to welcome Lakshmi, goddess of wealth and prosperity. So why not a surprise inspection tour by the goddess herself ? Lively improvisations were stimulated and soon a set of characters and a story emerged. There were two sets of characters —the celestial and the earthly; the first represented by a bored Lakshmi weary of heaven and looking for new amusements, a cunning Narada Muni playing his usual pranks to teach mortals a lesson, and a Vishnu too burdened with the administrative chores of running the universe to have time for his wife. And on earth, a diverse and motley bunch of people living in a typical labour camp. The problem reared its head at the start—even in the first improvisation, it seemed that the ordinary people spoke in dialect while the divine characters expressed themselves in chaste and literary Hindi ! But when it was time to make the puppets, the conflict broke out in a new form—how should they be dressed ? Again, it seemed the mortals wore the traditional Rajasthani costumes,—ghaghras, kabzas and lugdis for the women, safas and dhotis for the men—while the celestials were to be decked out in gaudy pink nylon saris worn the urban way.

At first, many felt that it was right and helpful to make some distinction between the two groups, and that this was faithful to the traditional methods of identifying characters but on a closer look, it seemed that the 'celestials' looked and spoke dangerously like the middle-class so-called 'educated' city people, while the others were the ignorant rustics. Was this not elitism again ? said some. Yes, but the gods *are* different, was the stubborn reply of the others. The argument raged back and forth and no solution was in sight till a compromise was found in the idea that the gods appear to mortals in the form in

which they are most easily comprehended. This was philosophic enough to satisfy the traditionalists in the group and made sense at a practical level. So in the end all the puppets were clothed as Rajasthani villagers, and all spoke the same language, though, of course, the gods had command of many more ! With familiar gods and goddesses, the play took a new and more vital shape —the atmosphere of a folk Diwali was created at once, celebrated with gusto and sly humour, at a rollicking pace. Suddenly, the message came through without anybody having spoken it. Identification had been achieved—through fantasy.

The second example stems from a growing dissatisfaction with content. Were we going only to talk of literacy and health and education as our themes? Could we have the courage to deal with some burning issues ? A discussion with staff yielded new insights: many of them had noticed and been bothered by the attitudes towards the treatment of women. So this was taken up as the theme for a series of discussions. The staff had much to say about what they had noticed on the subject of marriage, family life, relations between men and women, the role of women in the family and the social status of women among migrant workers.

A long and rambling discussion boiled down concretely to a few points that could dramatize sexism within the family. The men and women worked equal and long hours—yet the women had to bear all the additional burden of housework at the end

of the day, with no participation by the men; they both brought home earnings that fed the family, yet control over expenditure usually rested with the men; most obvious were the instances of violence and beating, usually related to heavy drinking. Could we build a drama to highlight these issues ? Enthusiastically, the group went to work, selecting as their protagonist a typical migrant family. Everyman and Everywoman, perhaps, but rounded, credible human beings both of whom could engage the sympathies of the spectators. But as the play grew, it seemed that there were no simple answers—at every point, there were alternatives available and choices to be made; the choices people made brought their own consequences and in turn affected the available choices in the future. Deep beneath the surface, appeared the real message of the play: you can change your life or—the possibilities of choice. Dared we explore this radical idea with a group of people long accustomed to accept whatever life brought, whose economic situation gave little room for choices in the world of work, whose social life was rooted in custom, and whose psychological security perhaps rested on the certainties and safety of the known ? And if we dared, could the drama really become a medium for reflection on such issues ?

We decided to try. So the play was constructed as a series of episodes, each scene determined by the choices which the characters had made in the previous one, and the play was to be staged as a 'participatory' one, posing questions to the audience and leaving it to them to make the decisions. For the players, it was hard to accept that some scenes, lovingly composed and practised, might never be used at all if the spectators made a different choice; that the performance might last only half an hour or go on for two. Nevertheless,

they agreed to try. The device agreed upon was to use the 'sutradhar' to pose the questions and draw the answers at every point from the audience. What actually happened in the first few performances was that there was little genuine participation. The audience appeared amused by the questions, threw out answers quickly and without much thought and the play went ahead smoothly and without interruption, as if no such uncomfortable query had been raised. Obviously, the technique was not good enough, and something more was needed. The play was restructured so that there was only one main choice point, at which several alternative solutions were possible. The first half was performed one night, and the audience was invited to propose solutions to the problem posed and told that the play could be concluded only if they suggested what should happen next. On the following night, discussions were arranged for groups of men and women on the work-site, led by the literacy teachers and members of staff, with some of the actors in the play present as passive observers to find out what people thought. On the third night, the 'sutradhar' asked the audience what they had decided and then continued the performance of the play apparently at the direction of the audience though in fact, enough preparation had been done in advance to make it possible. With all its limitations of playing in the open air to mobile audiences, the composition of which could change from night to night, this yielded results which made all the effort seem worthwhile. Long and serious discussions did in fact take place on the issues; though both groups tended to get side-tracked into the issue of drunkenness, which was mistakenly given too much prominence in performance. At the same time, more pointed attention was paid to the play itself and they all seemed to get much more out of the dramatic experience. All observers agreed that a genuine place of 'consciousness-raising' had taken place. Feminists may be interested in the outcome of the discussions. In the men's groups, a sense of guilt about male attitudes to women was pervasive, and most of them felt the male protagonist should reform, improve, change himself and otherwise make amends to his mistreated wife. But in the women's groups, surprisingly enough, the 'double' role was accepted as an immutable law of nature which it was futile to try to change; rather, they suggested that wisdom lay in using 'feminine' wiles to get around husbands and that the superiority of women lay in the ability to 'manage' men quietly—a very pragmatic and down-to-earth perception. It is too much to expect that so simple an exercise can by itself bring about change in attitudes—but perceptions were revealed and opinions aired, awareness created. Perhaps the play, with its haunting melodies and pointed songs

remained in the memory and kept that awareness alive long after the occasion was forgotten. Looking back on the story of *Lok Doot*, it seems that its repertoire has, all unknowingly, taken the shape of a sort of serial story on the life of the migrant workers in Delhi, each new chapter revealing another aspect, another problem, another face, but always centering around the same group of people and their concerns. It is truly the people's drama, holding a mirror to life—not in the sense of literally reflecting life as it actually is, but of using artistic devices to create a portrait of life that can be confronted. To do this, art must have integrity which gives it the right and the freedom to select, to distort, to exaggerate, to deviate, and in so doing to create a vision that is not only true, as a mirror is true, but which has a resonance that will remain when the play is gone. This applies whether a large social and emotional issue is being dealt with as a myth, using the resonance of symbols, or a colourful audio-visual is used to exaggerate a simple and well-known truth that is most often forgotten. Drama is not life; it is larger than life, and it is good communication precisely because it is larger than life. In growing from a group of amateur entertainers to a team of communicators, *Lok Doot* has moved towards a practical understanding of this attitude. Like a child learning to walk, it has taken perhaps only five clumsy steps forward in five years; but if they are steps towards the light, the journey begun has not been in vain. □

Mina Swaminathan

Lok Doot
The Repertoire of Educational Theatre

SOCIAL DRAMA

Tar (Telegram)
A humorous skit on the consequences of illiteracy, depending on verbal comedy and farcical acting (1976)

Andh Viswas (Superstition)
Another humorous skit, using the devices of the 'well-made plot' and confusion of identity to show how superstition can become the means of exploitation (1978)

Jhootha Ticket (The Wrong Ticket)
Yet another skit based on a real-life incident, the comedy enriched by detailed observations of daily life in the labour camp and the city (1979)

Andha Beta Kanjoos Baap (The Miser's Blind Son)
A didactic play on the importance of eating green vegetables, entirely composed in spoken verse and folk song and acted in mime—an experiment in a new form (1979)

Lallua (The Spoilt Darling)
A satire on the antics of the half-educated, freely adapting the folk songs of the Braj region (1979)

Rog Rani (The Queen of Disease)
A didactic science-fiction fantasy on the conquest of disease, mixing mime, music and the spoken word and using masks for contrast (1980)

Ekalavya
The myth retold, using parallel stories and the traditional ballad forms to bring home the universality of the ancient tale (1980)

Kissa Ghar Ghar Ka (Every Family's Story)
An experimental 'participatory' problem-solving play, used to stimulate critical reflection on the issue of women's roles and status, drawing on folk theatre traditions and the repertoire of folk music (1981)

RELIGIOUS/MYTHOLOGICAL

Meera
A devotional play based on the life of the saint Meera in mime and music in bhajan mandali style (1976)

Shabari

Another musical mime in bhajan mandali style, telling the story of the classic untouchable woman of the Ramayana (1976)

Buddha

A musical mime recreation of the life of Gautama Buddha, using urban popular music, satire and mime to draw attention to the teachings of the Buddha (1977)

Ram Leela

Short extracts from the Ram Leela in traditional Pahari style, for seasonal performance only (1978)

CHILDREN'S PLAYS

Akal Badi ya Bhains (The Hare and the Lion)

A tale from the Panchatantra, told with masks and music (1976)

Bagula Bhagat (The Wicked Crane)

Another tale from the Panchatantra, with masks and music (1977)

Ekta Mein Bal Hai (Unity is Strength)

A tale from Hitopadesa, told in dance and mime, to folk music and speech (1979)

Moorkh Pandit (The Tiger, the Brahman and the Jackal)

A tale from the Panchatantra, using masks and folk music (1980)

Sahasi Bandhu (The Clever Friends)

An original workshop musical production specially composed for the Year of the Disabled (1981)

Teesmarkhan (The Valiant Little Tailor)

An adaption of a widely-known folk tale working with human-sized puppets (1982)

MINI-THEATRE

Rog Rani (The Queen of Disease)

An adaptation of the traditional Rajasthani 'phad' or scroll, used along with ballad-style singing (1980)

Lakshmi Pravesh (The Coming of Lakshmi)

A glove puppet play on the theme of environmental hygiene (1980)

Thotha-Maina (The Birds)

A flash-card presentation by Thotha (parrot) and Myna, the traditional story-tellers, on the importance of immunisation (1981)

Balwadi Kya Hai ? (What is a Balwadi?)

A 'kavad' or magic folding story-box from Madhya Pradesh, with ballad-style singing, on the value of preschool education (1982)